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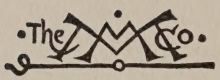
THE ROMANCE OF HASSIDISM



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THE ROMANCE OF HASSIDISM

BY
JACOB S. MINKIN

NEW YORK
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1935

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SET UP BY BROWN BROTHERS LINOTYPERS
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TO
MY WIFE FANNY
IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE

It is the author's opinion that the story of Hassidism, its struggles and triumphs, its faith and ideals, can best be told through the outstanding personalities who created this movement of romantic mysticism and spread it among the masses. From the comparatively large number of Hassidic saints and teachers, the author has selected men whose faith reflected not only their own soul's conflicts and harmonies, but who also had the widest influence on the movement they created.

Hassidism, as has been well said, is not a cult but a culture. All that men vaguely felt and experienced is represented in it. The genius of its founders has expressed itself in every known form of human creativeness. It is mystical, it is poetical; it is ecstatic, it is philosophical; it possesses the simplicity of the child and the subtlety of the scholar. It is full of harmonies and discords, of contradictions and agreements—as complex and varied as was the life of the multitudes of men who followed its teachings. All that Hassidism was and still hopes to be, is reflected in the life of the men who form the basic structure of this book. They opened the road which the later generations faithfully followed. By describing their experiences, the author feels he has portrayed Hassidism in all its shades and colors, in all its pathos and majesty.

The writer was often embarrassed not by the paucity of the material, but by its wealth and abundance. As is well known, the subject of Hassidism has an accumulated literature that may fairly be described as stupendous, having long attracted the interest and curiosity of men

of every shade of opinion. While little that has been written on the subject of Hassidism has escaped his attention, he feels particularly indebted to S. Dubnow, S. A. Horodezky, Professor Martin Buber, A. Kahana and Torsten Ysander. In the pages that follow, the author has made extensive use of their works, as, indeed, every man must who writes on this subject.

Although the author alone is responsible for what is in this book, he cannot forego the pleasure of recording his gratitude to the friends whose help has been of material assistance to him. He feels particularly indebted to his revered and beloved teacher and friend, Professor Louis Ginzberg, whose great learning, wisdom and patient counsel guided him at every step. He not only read the manuscript, made corrections, and suggested changes, but also dignified the book with a number of original notes.

It is the writer's greatest sorrow that the man—Rabbi Moses H. Rabinowitz—who had the largest share in this book, many of which pages have been patterned after the model which his learning, wisdom and saintliness provided, passed away before seeing its completion. Although mentally related rather to the Gaon of Wilna than to any of the Hassidic saints mentioned in this book, he was by the purity of his life and the generosity of his soul a Hassid without calling himself by that name. In no more loving memory can the author hold his name than in the words of Daniel, "And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament."

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THE ROMANCE OF HASSIDISM

Chapter I

THE MYSTIC FLIGHT

The mystic flight of Hassidism is older than Israel Baal Shem Tob, older even than the Kabbalah with which name it is usually associated. Its roots reach deep down into the very subsoil of Jewish history and literature. The current of Jewish mysticism kept on flowing through all times and places—in Palestine and in Babylon, in Spain and Provence, in Germany and Poland—wherever Jews and Judaism found a home. When there was danger that Judaism might become sterile, formal and mechanical, the genius of Israel implanted within it at the very hour of its birth those mystic yearnings and experiences which kept it fresh and strong.

No one has ventured an opinion on the rise of Jewish mysticism; the oldest sources contain nothing but the vaguest allusions to the subject, as though afraid to disclose the secret of its birth. But its history is older than what is commonly believed, older even than the oldest Jewish tradition. There were mystic schools and circles in every important epoch in Jewish history. Long before the Oral Tradition became crystallized in the Talmud, there was another tradition, a kind of religious metaphysic, which, although not openly discussed or written down in books, was handed down for generations from one initiate to another.

As Babylon was the home where Rabbinism was perfected so was Palestine the mother of Jewish mysticism. It was only under its clear and unclouded sky that this child of pure fancy could be born. Under any other environment it would have become an involved and complicated doctrine with many commentaries and explana-

tions, as, indeed, happened when it was torn from its home and banished into exile.

The Bible, the greatest Jewish classic, is at the same time also the world's greatest classic of mysticism. Almost all the known forms of mysticism are to be found there—natural, devotional, contemplative and practical. The Jewish Prophets were the world's greatest mystics. Nowhere are such ardent, mystical longings for God to be found as in their words and works. Isaiah, in an inrush of divine illumination, beholds God with his train filling the Temple; Ezekiel feels himself lifted from his feet and carried from place to place; Zechariah receives the divine word through apocalyptic visions; the Book of Daniel is so surrounded with mystery that its secret has not yet been discovered, and in the Psalms we have what may be regarded the greatest textbook of mysticism, the mystical temperament of their authors bursting forth in every form of song, prayer and supplication. The greatest quests of the mystic for two thousand years—Creation and the Creator, or the visible world and the invisible God, which the Kabbalists called *Ma'aseh Bereshith* and *Ma'aseh Merkabah* [1]—were suggested by the opening chapters of Genesis and Ezekiel. The richest symbols of Kabbalah, its choicest metaphors and figures of speech, were taken from the pages of the Bible; and when the Zohar addresses God in such intimate and endearing terms as Father, Mother, Bride, Friend, Guide, Shepherd and Ancient of Days, the author but borrowed the imagery which was employed by the Prophets to describe their relation to the Deity.

II

When the scene was shifted from Palestine to Babylon, the mystic vision of the Jews was temporarily obscured but not permanently eclipsed. There was at first no great outburst of the mystic mood among the Jewish captives in Babylon, for the condition of the times called for

heroic and courageous workers rather than idle dreamers. This is why there is so little that is mystical to be found in the works of Ezrah and Nehemiah.

By the rivers of Babylon the Jews sat and wept, but tears were not the only answer they gave to the new conditions of their exile and captivity. Those were great and stirring times, a whole nation had to be re-educated. The Jews had to be taken to school. They had to be trained in the three essentials of their new life—reading, writing and conformity to the *Torah* (the Old Testament). But soon the mystic vision flamed up in a new school of poets, prophets and teachers. The very suffering the Jews had endured, the loss of their state and Temple, made them turn away from the shadowy things of this life and cling more tenderly to God. It was then that the most astonishing dream, the very capstone of mysticism and the Kabbalah—the dream of the Messiah —was born. The hearts of the captive nation yearned for a Redeemer; with growing impatience they waited for his coming. Their misfortunes must end; Jerusalem must be restored, the Temple rebuilt, the fallen race raised—thus it was that the Messiah cult came into existence.

But the Messianic faith was not the only memory the returning exiles carried away from the land of their captivity. For the first time the Jews came in contact with a great and powerful civilization outside the borders of their own country; for Babylon under the Persian domination was not only a great empire of hanging gardens and rich palaces, but the scene of a new and complicated religious civilization. Although Zoroastrianism was still in its infancy when the Jews were beginning to return to their homeland, it had already broken ground for a new kind of religious metaphysic that was of no small influence on the religious development of the people on the other side of the Euphrates. It was a religion of ghosts and demons, of angels and devils, of reward and

punishment, of heaven and hell; a new theory of death and resurrection, of an upper and nether world that Zoroaster had introduced. Although it contrasted sharply with the grand simplicity of the Jewish vision of God, it nevertheless appealed strongly to the mystical and imaginative faculty of the Jews. Slowly the foreign influence was absorbed by them, till, in the hands of later mystics, it passed through the crucible of the Jewish mind and was made to harmonize with their faith and teachings.

III

With the returning exiles the mystic flight of the Jews took a homeward swing, to the land where it was born—to Palestine. It was a time of great activity that called for the busy toiler rather than the dreamer of glistening castles in the air. Discouragement was never so great and keen as what greeted the home-coming of the returning heroes. After three months of weary travel across the desert, they came upon a land that was a scene of ruin and desolation, with its capital buried under a cover of grass and wild weeds. Raiding enemies descended upon them from all sides, and the population of Palestine was shouting hate and contempt in the face of the pioneers of the reborn nation. The Samaritans, religious half-brothers of the Jews, were doing everything that intrigue and conspiracy could accomplish to make their burdens still more unbearable.

After seventeen years of unexampled toil and labor, the religious zeal and enthusiasm which carried them across the desert seeped out from the hearts of even the bravest of them, and many, remembering the peace and security of Babylon, cursed the day when they allowed themselves to leave it. But there were prophets among them, Haggai and Zechariah, and a steady flow of recruits from the land of their exile who brought with them a gleam of hope and courage. On and on they labored, with strong hands and uplifted hearts, holding the trowel

with one hand while repulsing the enemy with the other, till, slowly, from the mass of ruin and desolation the walls of Jerusalem and the dome of the Temple were seen to emerge. It was a modest performance, such as their reduced circumstances would permit. There was perhaps more pewter than gold in the Temple whose workmanship compared poorly with the Solomonic structure. The old men who had hazy recollections of the first sanctuary, wept, instead of rejoicing, when they beheld this plain and crude House of God; but it was a Temple just the same, rounding out gloriously their years of toil and struggle.

IV

A fresh wave of activity soon followed the revived state and nation. The Temple, though modest, served as a symbol of their revived national life. As though securing themselves against the future, the Jews laid the foundations of their new Commonwealth deep and sure. A Sopheric (literary) Age followed.

The leaders of this period were daring and heroic men, perhaps the most powerful personalities since the days of Moses and the Prophets. They were teachers, although no one had appointed them; reformers, although they did not call themselves by this name. Religious lines were tightened; the ancient Hebrew script was reformed; divine services other than sacrifices were instituted; contrary to the old command, synagogues sprang up everywhere in Palestine; greater attention was paid to education; the Law was made inviolate by hedging it about with a new priestly legislation, and a Council of Seventy arose to administer the religious and judicial affairs of the nation. The literature which they had brought with them from Babylon was enriched by new additions; new psalms were added to the old collection, and the voice of prophet and seer which had been silent for many a year, was heard again resounding in the hills of Zion.

The Jews were no longer living in isolation. The break-

ing up of their old nest rendered them susceptible to new ideas and influences that came streaming into Palestine from all sides. That the spiritual heritage of the Jewish people might not become lost or weakened by the inrush of the new influences, it was necessary to seal it with seven seals. Manuscripts were collected, texts were examined, whole chapters and books were carefully revised and analyzed, till a literary masterpiece—the Bible—calculated to withstand the test and challenge of the ages, was created.

V

The foundations of the revived nation had barely been laid than the Jews were confronted with a new danger. This time it came in the wake of the Macedonian conqueror, whom a Judean seer described as a "leopard with four wings of a fowl." [2] While Alexander the Great swept all over the world, adding kingdoms, races and nations to his empire, he left Palestine undisturbed. The grateful Jews fell under the spell of his meteoric career and celebrated his name in history and legend. They named their babies after him and their soldiers followed his armies as though he were the sword of Jehovah. He granted concessions, permitting them to worship their God undisturbed.

But different it was when Alexander died and his vast empire was divided between his less capable generals. Lacking their master's genius, they insisted not only on tribute, but demanded also the worship of the Greek gods. The Jews were willing to pay the tribute but rebelled against the worship. The estrangement led to hostility and hostility to rebellion. Stark horror swept over the whole nation when the struggle was carried to the very doors of the Temple. It was Zeus against Jehovah and Olympus against Zion. It was a holy war, if ever war can be dignified by such a name. It was not a struggle against grinding taxation or political power, but for the

things the Jews considered as their most sacred possession. It was also a mad war; nothing but sheer suicide. While on the one side there was skill, discipline, experience and seasoned armies, on the other side there was nothing besides the conviction and enthusiasm of a just cause.

Between the Greeks and the Jews there was nothing in common. They were different not only in their race and language but in everything else. Heretofore whatever impacts with the outside world the Jews had had were always with peoples who were closely allied to them by the ties of history, language and common destiny, but this time East and West, without the least knowledge or understanding of one another, met in conflict. The Greeks were subtle and polished, the Jews deep and thoughtful; the Greeks were cunning, cruel and mendacious, the Jews simple, unaffected and forgiving; the Greeks acknowledged a religion that did not possess even the remotest resemblance to a Decalogue, the Jews had an instinctive, inborn genius for morality; the Greeks lived in a world that was falling to bits, the Jews were in the very midst of their national consolidation.

Still, it was a wild struggle, as wild as were the times in which they lived. Never had the Jews staked everything on one card as then—their land, their nation, their religion, their independence. Success seemed impossible and failure inevitable. Nothing but desperation could turn a whole nation into such madmen. But in the end, enthusiasm won against cunning, and conviction against numbers. It was magnificent, it was insane, it was ludicrous, it was heroic. Tattered peasants fought against trained soldiers and bare hands against mailed fists. For more than twenty years they went on with it, till Judea was free and the Temple resounded with hymns of victory.

It is at this time that the world gets to hear of the Hassidim,[3] a group of saintly men, powerful person-

alities, the spiritual forebears of the men who, centuries later, were to take their name and carry on their tradition. Probably descendants from an ancient sect of Nazarites that was founded in the days of the Prophet Elijah, they followed exclusively the saintly life till times and circumstances brought them to the fore. No ordinary mystics must they have been, for the psalms and the Talmud are unsparing in their praise. They were strict adherents of ceremonial Judaism but had an eye for the inwardness of religion as well. Prayers seem to have been their principal occupation; but their devotions were not merely a mechanical repetition of words but a spiritual absorption in God. An ancient Jewish tradition tells of the "Ancient Hassidim" that they would spend a long time in profound meditation in order to fill their hearts with intense devotion to God before communing with Him. Neither would they allow themselves to be interrupted in their prayers by the approach of a king or a serpent coiling at their feet.[4] Whereas heretofore knowledge of the occult science was limited to exceptionally gifted men, there were now whole *Haburoth,*[5] or "Associations," which followed the gleam of the mystic ideal. Organized charity may be said to have originated with them, for, next to prayer, they considered benevolence as the highest function of religion.

VI

The Bible is not the only begotten child of the genius of the Jewish people. That the strong wine of the Jewish teachings might be preserved and retain its flavor it was poured into many bottles. Besides the authorized Bible, another literature, rich and fragrant, which, for want of another and better name, is called "Apocrypha," later developed.

Soon the framework of the Bible became too narrow for Israel's expanding genius. The Jew was no longer living in mental and spiritual isolation. His intellectual

horizon was widening into a vast empire that was receiving the tribute of many minds and lands. Great events had happened since the close of the Bible canon. The pressure from the outside world became too strong to be any longer resisted. Greece and Alexandria had come upon the scene, and they left their impress upon the Jewish mind. There were currents of thought running in all directions that had to be adapted and assimilated if there was to be no sterility in Judaism. The voice of the major prophets was hushed, but in their stead arose other men who were gifted with divine speech. Shall they remain silent because the fruit of the first harvest had already been gathered?

As a result of the impact of Judaism upon foreign cultures, gaps had been created in the old Bible which needed to be filled. As time marched on, new questions such as death and resurrection, reward and punishment, the soul and its destiny, this life and the life hereafter, arose, to which the anguished heart of the nation demanded an answer. They had to be arranged, grouped and sifted so as to harmonize with the Jewish outlook. Such is the content of the Apocrypha. It is a literature which weaves the blossoms of the expanding and maturing genius of the Jews into garlands of the changed times. It covers a period of three hundred years. In its pages are the clang of arms and the ideals of peace; the sighs and cries of a suffering nation, and the visions of its ultimate redemption; the spectacle of a troubled and imperfect world, and the dream of a happier social order with the ushering in of the Messianic kingdom.

Many of these books were composed secretly and were kept in hiding, whence the name of this literature "Apocrypha," which is a Greek word meaning "concealed." The secrecy in which these books were held may have been due to the fact that they were hidden from the eyes of the masses on account of their sacred teachings and mystic character. That the works might not be

spurned by their contemporaries on account of the novelties they contained, great names such as Enoch, Solomon, Jeremiah, Ezra, Esther, etc., were attached to them. The vanity of authorship was not the fashion of that day, and writers were only too glad to keep themselves in the background if only their work survived.

Like its older sister, the Bible, the Apocrypha is the product of diverse hearts, times, places and circumstances. It is religious, it is national; it is historical, it is allegorical; it is didactic, it is mystical; it is instructive, it is entertaining; it is serious, it is satirical; it tells of Jewish suffering and weaves beautiful dreams of redemption. It carries on faithfully the tradition of the earlier Bible and sometimes spoils the effect by a too close adherence to the ancient text.

As in the authorized Bible, almost all the elements of mysticism are to be found in the Apocrypha. Even more outspoken than the old Scriptures, it registers the mystic flight which at that time flamed up in the soul of the Jewish people. The mystic vision that was heretofore secretly and sacredly guarded by the Prophets, spoken of in whispers and by signs and symbols, rose to a complete and complicated system in the works of their spiritual descendants. How far the mystical speculations must have fascinated the hearts of the people, may be seen from the admonition of Ben Sira addressed to his contemporaries about the year 200 B.C.E. "Search not for the things which are too wonderful, and thou shalt not have business with the secret things." [8]

VII

Fresh trials and tribulations abounded again for the Jews. The glorious triumph of the Maccabees ended most ingloriously. It was less than a hundred years since Judea was ablaze with the white passion for liberty, but all that was left of that heroic struggle was a little throne supported by the aid of foreign troops. Palestine became

again a scene of clashing and conflicting interests, with kings, princes and priests playing their little and inglorious part.

But even while the shouts of war and clang of arms were rending the air, a spiritual ideal that was destined to carry the spirit and message of Israel to the remotest times was being evolved. More enduring than the Maccabean victory was the mystic cord that was being woven by teachers, dreamers and idealists. Jewish theosophy, till now the spiritual diversion of a few chosen and select minds, became the popular passion of whole groups of men. The mystic ideal of the Jewish people rose to full tide in the midst of that strange and curious brotherhood of men, whom history, for want of any better name, labelled as Essenes. Modern scholars have favored the idea that they were the first systematizers and practitioners of an occult science which later went by the name of Kabbalah, and have even interpreted their name to mean "those who are engaged in secret things." [7]

The spiritual descendants of the "Ancient Hassidim," even Nazarites, according to some authorities, and the followers of a monastic Pythagorian, Egyptian, and even Buddhistic ideal, according to others, the Essenes not alone founded a new sect, but almost a new religion. They were the first to have organized a mystic brotherhood that pledged itself to live the pure and simple life of Moses and the Prophets. They were weary of the noisy political atmosphere of their country; took no interest in politics; sided with neither the Sadducees nor the Pharisees, but retired to the desert where they lived their own unique, ascetic life. They secluded themselves from their fellow men, steeped themselves in the mystic lore, and practiced the theosophic system which they believed would hasten the coming of the Messianic kingdom.

They were the spiritual forebears of the Kabbalists, many of whose arts and rites the latter practiced. They searched the words and the very letters of the Torah for

their hidden meaning. They interpreted dreams, revealed the future, cured the sick, performed miracles, exorcized devils, and even possessed a *Sefer Refuoth,* or "Book of Remedies," which they attributed to King Solomon. People hung upon their words, and their very presence was regarded as a charm against evil spirits. They were socialists in having organized a social order that was high above the standards of their time. They were communists in that they encouraged no personal possessions but owned everything in common. Silent and uncommunicative men, leaving no legacy of either books or documents behind, fervent in their prayers, jealously guarding the mystic secret of their brotherhood, and practicing a personal and social morality that was much in advance of the contemporary level, the Essenes were the first mystic sect in Jewish history. It is no rash conclusion to form that they laid down many of the ideals and principles which the later mystics and Kabbalists followed. The Jewish sources are very vague about them, but they were held in high esteem by Philo and Josephus, and even their non-Jewish contemporaries spoke of them in the highest terms of praise and admiration.[8]

VIII

The mystic cord woven of the strands of a great variety of influences, received its strongest support in Alexandria. In the city situated on the Nile delta, founded by Alexander, a friend and protector of the Jews, the Jewish genius rose, after Palestine, to its highest perfection. There was a cosmopolitan atmosphere in the Egyptian metropolis that reflected the liberal spirit of its founder. Although geographically located in the land of the Pharaohs, their memory had long since been forgotten by the Jews.

Alexandria was a city of thinkers, poets and mystics. The East and the West met there, and Jews and Greeks fraternized, traded and philosophized together. Moses and Plato were equally honored there, and their com-

bined wisdom encouraged the golden promise of a new spiritual revelation. While the Jews occupied special quarters in the city, comparable to what became later known as "ghetto," they had their own officers, were ruled by their own laws, and developed their own culture. Although Alexandria was to Jews not without its sad memories, it is on the whole happy and pleasant thoughts that the city recalls.

Philo was the favorite son of this Jerusalem of the Jewish Diaspora. A strange and curious character was this Alexandrian philosopher, a man who influenced the thought of all, Jews, Greeks and Christians alike. He possessed the qualities of a saint and the mental detachment of a philosopher. He lived a quiet, modest and retired life for which he gave up the wealth and station to which he was born.[9] He was a literary man who wrote Greek in a style that Plato might have envied. He strove to revive in Alexandria the best traditions of Athens and to weave its beautiful blossoms in a new garland. He was by far the ablest ambassador Grecian learning could have sent into the new world.

But he was also a good and warm Jew, the finest representative his race had sent to the Gentile world. He knew his Bible, although only in translation, and tried to fit its teachings to the spirit and temper of his age. The Jews and Greeks were at that time not on the best terms, and he strove to create an *entente cordiale* by which the two would understand each other. He anticipated Maimonides by at least a thousand years; for, as Aristotle was the Jewish philosopher of the tenth century, Plato was the fashion of the first. As Maimonides interpreted Judaism in the light of the former philosopher, Philo tried to explain the Bible in terms of the latter. Besides being a philosopher, Plato was also a poet and something of a mystic, and the affinity which Philo was trying to establish between him and the Bible was far from an impossible task.

The results, however, did not always square with the

established tradition, and Jewish history is grateful to Philo for his good intentions rather than his performances.[10] He became a leader of the allegorical school. He searched for the hidden meaning of the words and the stories of the Torah and endeavored to reveal their inner, spiritual import. He attempted in the first century what the Zohar had done thirteen hundred years later. In the hands of Philo, Bible stories and characters became dissolved of their flesh and blood and assumed an allegorical and symbolic meaning. The same was also the case with the positive and negative commandments of the Torah, although he was himself scrupulous in their observance and commanded his contemporaries to be likewise.[11]

Jewish mysticism knew no warmer friend than Philo and the Kabbalah may acclaim him as its spiritual father and founder. If he did not originate its teachings, they were certainly inspired by him. He taught a doctrine of *Divine Sophia,* a medium bridging the gulf between God and the world, which is almost the exact counterpart of the Kabbalistic *En-Sof.* The Hassidic teaching of *Bitul Ha-Yesh,* or "Self Denial," is but a mystic reflection of Philo's ethical ideal that culminates in meditation, renunciation and unconditional surrender of the Self to The Supreme. When Philo said that he was speaking to an especially initiated class, and warned his readers not to divulge his teachings to the vulgar and undisciplined, he but reflected the spirit of the rabbis who taught the esoteric doctrine exclusively to an elect circle who alone were fit, in their judgment, to receive the truths of this profound theology.

From Philo Jewish mysticism received its greatest impetus. He was a thinker in whose mind this doctrine rose to a system. One must agree with Norman Bentwich when he says: "We may, then, without rashness conclude that the later Kabbalah is a coarser development, for a less enlightened and less philosophical age, of the Gnostic

material which Philo refashioned in the light of Platonism for the Hellenized community at Alexandria." [12]

IX

A new spiritual ferment, the Talmud,[12a] made itself felt within the Jewish household. Although the complaint, "There is no more prophet among us" is often heard, the same holy, ennobling and creative influence was at work. Even more wondrous and subtle than the Prophets, a mystic tradition was being woven by the rabbis which served and preserved the Jewish people for thousands of years. Israel that gave to the world one book, the Bible, was now weaving the stuff of which the other book, the Talmud, was to be made. How dissimilar in tone and appearance, yet, how like in aim and purpose these two books are! One is the promise, the other the fulfillment; one is pastoral, idyllic, poetic, the other is mellowed with the wisdom and experience of ripened age; one is spangled with dreams, hopes and visions, the other provides the means and methods by which they can be turned into realities. No other two literary works could be more closely alike. No wonder Jewish imagination conceived them as coming at the same time and from the same hand.

Although the rabbis erected a fence around the Jew and the Torah, they did not build it so high as to shut out the interplay of human feelings and emotions. Poetry may not have been the special function of the rabbis, yet few men possessed the poetic gift in a richer and greater measure than they. Mysticism is only poetry touched with the sense of God, and in this few poets excelled them. They could spread a rainbow of romance over the most subtle casuistry, and the dullest pages of the Talmud were made to glisten under their hands.

A certain esoteric wisdom, a kind of secret religious philosophy, was known to the earliest masters of the Talmud. Although not taught openly, it was whispered

about in the schools of Palestine long before the redaction of the Mishnah.[12b] The spirit-world occupies no small part in the wisdom of the sages, many of the most beautiful pages of the Gemarah [12c] being devoted to its exposition.

Jewish religious teachers in all ages have intended their work not for the masses but for the select few who were deemed fit to understand their doctrine. The *Halakha,* which means "a way of life," is a subject of study for all, but not those mystical branches of knowledge for which special preparation and discipline were required. They held with Plato that with the metaphysical speculations special care is to be taken so as not to produce all sorts of wild ideas. As though to shield it from the common masses, special rules and regulations were established for its study. "Every one who meddles with the following four things it were better for him were he not to be born; viz., What is above and what is beneath, what is before and what is after." [13] Only those who were distinguished for wisdom, intelligence and maturity of years were permitted to have access to it. Rabbi Zeera would not confide the secret knowledge of the Torah except to the Chief of the Court, or to one whose heart is tempered by age or responsibility. When a certain youth was at one time explaining the secret of Ma'asseh Merkabah, a fire came forth and consumed him, and when the question was asked why it occurred, the answer given, was, "His time had not yet come." When Rabbi Yohanan invited Rabbi Eleazer to come and be instructed in the Merkabah, the latter replied, "I am not yet old enough for that." [14] Swift and crushing was the punishment of those who entered the courts of the occult science without the necessary self-discipline. Four men attempted to penetrate its secret—Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Abuyah and Rabbi Akiba. The first lost his life, the second his reason, the third his faith, and only the fourth, Rabbi Akiba, passed through its jungles unscathed.[15]

But although tampering with the esoteric secret was forbidden, the mystic urge could not be suppressed. The darker the theme, the more dangerous the study, the more attractive was the subject. Many of the best-known sages of the Talmud busied themselves with it. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai is credited with having been familiar with every branch of the secret lore. He understood the language of the ministering angels, the speech of the demons, the talk of the trees, and the veiled wisdom of the Merkabah.[16] He was not only fully initiated in this knowledge himself but also taught it to his favorite disciple, Rabbi Eleazer ben Arakh.[17] When Ben Azzai was contemplating the secrets of the Torah, flames blazed up around him.[18] Of Rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel, a favorite pupil of Hillel, it is told, that when he was meditating upon the mysteries of the Torah, passing birds were consumed by the fire of his words;[19] and, when he wished to complete his translation of the Scriptures, a heavenly voice rang out, "Enough, thou hast reached the limit beyond which thou canst not go."[20]

Mysticism casts a halo of romance over many of the most arid pages of the Talmud, spreading as it were a magic carpet that carries the student to lands that are strange and beautiful. At its touch Jewish fantasy which had been slumbering for a thousand years, was revived once more. Myths and legends, stories and fables to rival any the Orient has produced, came into existence. The unbridled fancy of the Jews was once more roaming in a fairy-land that was rich and beautiful. What are the most daring stories of the latter-day Hassidic saints as compared with the unsurpassed legends that are told in the name of Rabbi Haninah ben Dosa, Rabbi Phinehas ben Yair, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, or Honi the Circle Drawer?[21] These constitute a pageantry on which the imagination of the Jewish people has been feeding for thousands of years.

X

The current of mysticism which began in Palestine, rose in Babylon to a high tide. The Jew, no longer in contact with the realities of life, found in mysticism an outlet for his extremely alert and sensitive imagination, abandoning himself to its bewildering mazes without let or hindrance.

Babylon, which witnessed the first national humiliation of the Jews, now recorded their greatest spiritual and intellectual triumphs. The Jewish genius that originated in Palestine received its highest maturity and development in the land of its first captivity. Upon the foundations of the Talmud, laid in Palestine, Babylon reared a proud and imposing structure. As though to compensate the Jew for the great injustice it had committed against him, Babylon sharpened his intellect to dazzling brilliancy. With the flight of Jewish learning across the Euphrates, mysticism, or the *Kabbalah,*[22] as it became later known, found a new home. The daring speculations concerning "what is above and what is beneath, what is before and what is after," were now pursued with the greatest warmth and eagerness. The Oriental mind loves to give a sense of mystery to what it considers as its deepest wisdom, and in Babylon, under the domination of Arabic culture, the Jews were afforded an opportunity for the exercise of their widest and wildest imagination. Arabic philosophy, deriving its mysticism from Jewish Gnosticism, taught a doctrine of a collective soul from which all the existing souls in the world emanate, and living in such a highly mystical atmosphere, it is no wonder that the occult faculty of the Jews took on new wings and soared to its greatest heights.

The Gaonic period,[23] the period that followed the completion of the Talmud, may be regarded as the classical age of Jewish mysticism. Mystical speculations of which there were many, but still without a literature, were now

dignified by the appearance of great and important books. A large number of works of mysterious name and origin, to which high, if not divine, authorship was attributed, were the result of this period.[24]

Among the Jews no book had any chance of success unless it bore the name of a great authority. It was thus that the most honored names in Jewish history, Adam, Abraham, Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Ishmael, were accepted as the authors of the mystical or Kabbalistic works of the Gaonic period. The most important of these writings is *Sefer Yezirah* "The Book of Creation," a curious and mysterious little book, a pioneer work in Jewish philosophy, written in Mishnaic style and diction, ascribing supernatural and creative power to the forms, sounds, shapes, position and numerical value of the letters of the alphabet. Though a small book, it has been of the greatest influence on the Jewish mind since the creation of the Talmud. The foremost Jewish scholars, from Saadyah Gaon in the eighth to Rabbi Elijah of Wilna in the eighteenth century, have written commentaries to it and the Kabbalistic speculations of more than a thousand years centered about this work. The magic flight which passed through many lands and times never did so well as when it rested its wings in Babylon; for in this country a mystic doctrine was spun which influenced Jewish life for many generations.

XI

The Kabbalah was the answer the Jews gave to the rationalistic philosophy of the Spanish school. Between the literalism of the rabbis and the rationalism of the philosophers Judaism was threatened with utter confusion and impotence. The history of rationalism in Spain was rooted in the political and cultural conditions of the country. In an atmosphere of tolerance and enlightenment the Jews soon rivalled their Mohammedan brethren in poetry, science, and philosophy. In an astonishingly

short time they produced such men as Gabirol, Halevi, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Crescas and Albo. Foreign ideas and non-Jewish teachings were squeezed into the ill-fitting framework of the Torah. The Jewish masses were bewildered when they were bidden to follow an ideal they could not comprehend, much less accept. The result was that a revulsion of feeling soon made itself evident. And, strange to say, it came from above and not from below, from the thinking classes and not from the simple-hearted masses, from men like Nahmanides and Solomon Adreth who were themselves equipped with all the learning and science of their age but nevertheless realized the danger of the situation.

The very methods that were employed to save Judaism, threatened to destroy it. Philosophy, which was calculated to unify Judaism and bring it under the rule of reason and logic, divided it. Maimonides, who sought to bring about clearness and simplicity into the Jewish religion, helped to create confusion and misunderstanding. The peace and harmony he had hoped to establish ended in strife and bitterness. The result was that an excess in one direction ended in an excess in the other, and the generation that wrote philosophy and exalted Aristotle was followed by a generation that glorified the Kabbalah and wrote commentaries to the "Book of Creation." [25]

At the very moment the philosophers were busy trying to harmonize Zion with Hellas, and Aristotle with Moses, a spiritual reaction swept over the Jews of Spain, and later over the Jews of the entire world, which removed them further and further away from the literalism of the rabbis on the one hand and the enlightened rationalism on the other. The mystic flight was beginning to gather momentum among the Jews of Spain and their greatest scholars were flocking under the banner of the occult science. They were beginning to despair of the icy regions of pure reason to which the philosophers were

leading them. The simple and unsophisticated masses were yearning for a positive and personal God they could understand and follow, and who in turn would understand them, instead of the postulated Deity of the philosophers. It was as a result of this spiritual uprising that a book, *Sefer Ha-Zohar,* "The Book of Splendor," [28] appeared, which, after the Bible and the Talmud, is one of the most popular books the Jews had given to the world.

Great spiritual changes have come about through wars or economic causes, but this is the story of a great change that came over the life of the Jews in Spain, indeed, the world over, through the power and influence of a book. It was only in the highly mystical atmosphere in which the Jews were living at that time that such a miracle was possible. Although for many generations the knowledge of the occult science was kept alive among the Jews in numerous scrawl-books, it was not until the coming of the Zohar that the Kabbalah assumed the dignity and importance of a religion.

It was a legend which brought the Zohar into the world, and legendary has been its hold and influence over the hearts of countless men for nearly seven hundred years. It took hundreds of years before the Bible, the first Jewish classic, was brought into existence, and no less than half a millennium was required before the other classic, the Talmud, was created, but this time, almost overnight, a book is strangely and literally blown into existence and immediately captures the hearts and affections of thousands of Jews in all parts of the world.

There is a story that Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and his son Rabbi Eliezer in order to escape a Roman persecution, hid themselves in a cave where they remained for thirteen years. What did they do all that time? They were, of course, meditating upon the essence of God, the Torah, Israel and the Universe, and wrote down their reflections on scraps of parchment. For many centuries the book was lost, hidden or buried amid the treasures of the

Holy Land. But one day, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, its weather-beaten pages were discovered near the Jordan, when, after a miraculous trip through the air, a violent wind blew it into the humble dwelling of an impecunious Spanish rabbi, Moses de Leon. To make the legend of the antiquity of the Zohar still more plausible, the book is written in a Chaldaic dialect, which was the spoken idiom of the Jews of Palestine at the time of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the supposed author of Zohar.

Literary forgeries are not always easy to discover. The counterfeit may be made to resemble the original so closely as to mislead even the most expert eye. But it requires no high grade of skill to detect the fabrication that was perpetrated by Moses de Leon, for he betrayed himself at almost every step. It is not exclusively the internal evidence of the Zohar or its many allusions to contemporary events, men and sources which stamp the book as a product of the thirteenth century, but his own wife and daughter, who, not aware of the gravity of their admission, condemned the author more seriously than the most scholarly research could do. But fantastic as the story of the authorship of the Zohar may be, the Jews had an easy belief in such legends and received them with unquestioning faith. As Graetz puts it, "The Zohar met with the unquestioned applause of the Kabbalists, because it supplied a want which had to be provided for one way or another." [27]

XII

While pretending to be a commentary on the Five Books of Moses, the Zohar is really much more than that—a fantastic tale such as no spinner of Oriental yarn had ever invented. A bewildering medley of ideas, a literature rich and varied, an unsystematic assortment of fact and fable, of truth and fiction, of history and tradition, it is one of the most stupendous creations of a single

mind. Of unequal tone and quality, sometimes dull and prosaic, and at other times highly poetical and imaginative, critics discovered in it the evidence of many hands and sources. Many civilizations, many religions and philosophies are said to have contributed the material to the building of this imposing edifice, all of which the author incorporated in their original. Like the Bible and the Talmud, the Zohar possesses the quality and charm of Jewish inconsistency.

The Zohar sets out to reveal the hidden meaning of the Torah. What gives the Torah its value, importance and sanctity is its inner mystic sense. The Bible has an outward and an inward form. Its outward framework consists of words, letters, stories and parables; but they have no meaning in themselves, except as the scaffolding for the secret meaning they possess. "Woe unto the men," the Zohar cries out, "who see in the Torah nothing but simple narrative and ordinary words. Were this so, we could even today compose a Torah which would equally be worthy of our esteem. But this is not so! Every word of the Torah contains an elevated sense and a sublime mystery. The narratives of the Torah are the garments for the Torah itself." [28]

Even the laws, precepts and commandments of the Torah have a meaning only when we understand the deep and sublime mysteries which they embody. The *Mitzvoth,* "commandments," resemble the fine coat which the fools admire, without stopping to consider what it covers. "Simpletons have an eye only for the garments of the Torah. But the wise, the servants of the Supreme King, those who dwell on the heights of Sinai, are concerned with the soul, which is the foundation of everything else which is the real Torah." [29]

The Zohar discovered for the Jew a new and unknown kingdom—the kingdom of the soul. The soul, about which the Bible and the Talmud are so strangely and disappointingly silent, is nowhere spoken of in such endear-

ing and glowing terms as in the Zohar. Such metaphors and figures of speech as "abodes of souls," "nest of souls," "garments of the souls," and "naked souls," abound everywhere in its pages. In the Zohar, which may be called the Book of the Soul, the soul occupies an important and dominant place making up as it were for its slight in the Bible and Talmud. "Believe not," says the Zohar, "that man consists solely of flesh, skin, and veins. The real part of man is his soul, and the things just mentioned, the skin, flesh, bones, and veins, are only an outward covering, a veil, but not the man. When man departs, he divests himself of all the veils which cover him." The vast space between heaven and earth is filled with souls, happy and luminous souls, shining seraphim ascending to their heavenly home; struggling and unfortunate souls that have to suffer the torments of purgatory before they can raise themselves to union with their Father.

A considerable part of the Zohar is devoted to the origin and destiny of the soul, its pilgrimage on earth, its reappearance among the living and its final merging with its Maker. The laws of the Torah have no other purpose, says the Zohar, than the union of the souls with the world of light, which is God. The souls existed in the mind of God before they assumed material form, and, since all souls must reach the highest state of purity before they can attain to union with the Oversoul, it follows that one body may sometimes prove inadequate and must experience the habitation of other bodies, until such time as they will have received their elevation. The Zohar thus says, "All souls must undergo transmigration, and men do not understand the way of the Holy One. . . . They know not how many transmigrations and hidden trials which they may have to undergo, nor do they know the number of souls and spirits which enter into the world and which do not return unto the palace of the Heavenly King." [30]

To the weary and heavy-laden, those who passed

through the crucible of suffering and bereavement, the Zohar addresses the following tender and comforting thoughts: "And the people of the world are wont to weep when the son (the soul) takes his leave from them. But if there be a wise man among them, he says to them, 'why weep ye? Is he not the son of the king? Is it not meet that he should take leave of you and live in the palace of his father?' . . . If all good men knew this, they would hail with joy the day when it behooves them to bid farewell to the world. Is it not the height of glory for them when the Queen (the Divine Presence) comes down into the midst of them to lead into the palace of the king to enjoy the delights thereof for evermore?" [31]

XIII

The Zohar was like a torch set to dry wood. Fraud or genius, the author became famous almost overnight. Moses de Leon did not himself live long enough to witness the full conquest of his masterpiece, for he died in 1305, but the book was already well enough on its way to give him an assurance of immortality. What he put into the mouth of Simeon ben Yohai, "Many will range themselves around the Zohar when it becomes known, and nourish their minds with it at the end of days," actually happened after his death. Thousands of people were wonderstruck at its appearance, and demands for copies of the manuscript came in from almost all parts of the Jewish world. Its doctrines were instantaneously accepted as the revealed word of God. It became an integral part of the Torah, like the Bible and Talmud, and was studied by many with greater zeal and diligence than either.

Its colorfulness, its picturesqueness, its diversity of theme and style, its attractive spiritual explanations of biblical texts, and the interpolation of tender and moving prayers immediately captivated the hearts and attention of thousands of people. No such sensation had come to the Jews for a thousand years. To the herded and per-

secuted denizens of the ghetto, the Zohar was a prodigious novel, a daring and wonderful adventure. It flattered their faith in the future, for the book not only predicted the coming of the Messiah but calculated the very day of his advent. Strangely, almost miraculously, the Zohar made its way to almost every heart, scholars and laymen alike. Although there were Kabbalistic books before the appearance of the Zohar, it was quickly accepted as the great classic of the Kabbalah.[32]

Shortly after the coming of the Zohar Jewish literature assumed a new tone, as though it was waiting all these years for its refreshing and revivifying touch. Its high imaginative quality and wealth of stories and legends made it the most popular book of quotations. It is amazing with what joy and enthusiasm Jewish preachers and ethical writers fell upon it for apt sayings and illustrations. The Talmud and Midrash were neglected, if not altogether supplanted by it. Whereas heretofore they were the only source books, their place was now usurped by the Zohar. Shortly after its appearance Jewish scholars and writers adopted its style and language and circles for the study of this book were to be found in almost every country. The older books were still studied and venerated, but not with the same joy and enthusiasm as before; the precepts of the Torah were still obeyed and punctiliously carried out, but more out of a sense of duty and habit than of love. Their spontaneous and free-hearted passion was given to the Zohar alone. There are vague, obscure and difficult passages in the Zohar that tax the scholarship and ingenuity of the learned, but these are soon followed by other passages that are as bright and clear as the skies of the country which created them.

The Zohar influenced not only the Jewish world but Christian scholars as well. It attracted the attention of the men like Reuchlin, Melanchthon and Pico de la Mirandola. Dante came under its spell and Luther and Jacob Boehme were not free from its influence. The

Renaissance was indebted to it and it provided Protestantism with its mystical element.[33] The Kabbalah, which was waiting all these centuries for a literature to give it standing and dignity among scholars, at last produced a masterpiece which, like the Bible, could stand the test and challenge of the ages.

XIV

Judaism developed in Germany along different lines than in Spain and Portugal. Despite their greater proximity to these countries, the Germans' relations with their fellow Jews in the East were closer than with their co-religionists in the Pyrenean countries. There was a greater and more intimate spiritual affinity between the Jews of the Rhine country and their kinsmen in the Holy Land than with those in the kingdom of Castile and Aragon. While the Jews in Spain were enjoying the learning and culture of their age, the Jews of Germany were called upon to endure the most cruel persecution and oppression. This is the reason why few of the arts and sciences that were cultivated in Spain flourished among the Jews of Germany. Thus, there was among them little of science, little of philosophy, little of poetry, unless it be the poetry of the synagogue, which consisted for the most part of dirges lamenting their sad and unfortunate plight. Of the Maimunean controversy which was carried on by the Jews of Central Europe with such heat and passion, only the faintest echo was heard in Germany. While the Jews of Spain gave to the world grammarians, poets and philosophers, their brethren in the Rhineland wrote religious codes, ritual compendia and synagogue hymns. A nation that is fighting with its back to the wall for its bare existence is not in a mood to poetize or philosophize.

There were mystics in Germany, but their mysticism came not from Spain but from Babylon by the way of Italy.[34] Mysticism is the primitive hunger of the soul for God when the world has denied it everything else, and

there was plenty in the life of the German Jews to make them contemplative, reflective and introspective. Their life was hard, their experiences bitter and their misfortune mountain-high. The Crusades, the Black Death, the ritual murder charges, and cruelties and humiliations of a thousand sorts made their hearts black with despair. Under such circumstances they scanned the pages of the Bible for the meaning of their suffering, and not finding it there, turned to the wisdom of the Kabbalah. There were mystic groups in Germany who made the study of the occult science their principal occupation. When they felt themselves betrayed by this world they set their hearts on other-worldliness; when the earth would not have them, they cast their glance toward heaven. Rumors of the Kabbalah percolated to Germany from the East, and these were picked up by the scholars who handed them down to their disciples till it became a popular diversion. The doctrines of the "Practical Kabbalah" were taught and practiced in Germany almost three hundred years before it originated in Safed in the sixteenth century, for the mysticism of the German Jews was of an austere and personal kind, one of self-denial and renunciation. The country that rejected Hassidism in the eighteenth century prided itself on whole groups of men who became famous as *Hasside Ashkanaz,* "Saints of Germany." The "Book of Saints" may not be a Kabbalistic work in the narrow sense, but it teaches many of the doctrines and precepts of the Hassidic faith. It is an ethical treatise which insists upon the inwardness of prayer and sets its kingdom even higher than that of learning. It curbs the boast and arrogance of the learned and is full of tenderness and compassion for the lowly and uninstructed. It emphasizes the importance of the spiritual meaning of prayer and makes devotion instead of the mechanical repetition of words its highest object. It would have us rather pray in the vernacular than in the language which is no longer intelligible. It sets high value

on *Kavanah,* "Intention," and rebukes a scholar who acted slightingly toward prayer. Many of the other virtues of Hassidism such as meekness, humility and charity are taught and emphasized in its pages.

Baal Shem, a term found already in the Talmud, was revived again by Rabbi Judah the Saint, author of the "Book of Saints." [35] We do not know what the name implied—was the man thus described an enchanter, a miracle-worker, an exorciser of evil spirits, or just a man of good and holy repute? At any rate, it was a title which denoted more than mere scholarship. Rabbi Samuel, the father of Rabbi Judah Hassaid, addressing his younger son, said to him: "Know that you will be the head of an academy all your life, but, as for your brother, Judah, he will know what is above and what is beneath, he will be a Baal Shem." [36]

From the crucible of their degraded and impoverished circumstances, a new kind of Kabbalah was emerging among the Jews of Germany, one, to be sure, not as pretentious as the Kabbalah of Spain, but much more in harmony with the realities of the life of the people who produced it. In other words, the seeds were being sown for the "Practical Kabbalah," which, conceived in Germany, matured and developed in the Holy Land, was soon to conquer the whole of the Jewish world.

XV

The expulsion from Spain was the severest shock which the Jews received since the breaking up of their national home. The Jews never really felt themselves at home in the countries of Christian Europe. They were part of the liability which Europe took over after the liquidation of the Holy Roman Empire. But Spain was different. It was Oriental. It was magnificent—a land of grace and culture. Although geographically bound up with the fate of Europe, it looked back to a tradition which was not Christian. There was freedom, there was refinement,

there was an easy-going tolerance in Spain which coaxed forth the noblest sentiments of the heart and mind. Jew and Mohammedan were part of the same heritage of blood, race and language. It is no wonder that the Jewish genius suddenly flowered into so rich and variegated a culture of science, poetry and philosophy. When, therefore, under Catholic Christianity, the Jewish nest in Spain collapsed, a consternation, only equalled by the fall of their State and Temple, settled on the Jews.

The grief that was caused by the tragedy of the Jews in Spain was felt not only by the exiles but by the whole of the Jewish people. All felt as though, for the third time, the Temple had been destroyed and the sons of Zion sent into exile. The glory of the Jews had been extinguished, their pride humbled, their center destroyed, the strong pillar against which they leaned broken. What could their brethren of other countries expect at the hands of their tormentors when such fate could overcome the proudest and noblest sons of their race? For many years after their banishment the fugitives from Spain were knocking like beggars at the doors of their brethren in other countries. Exhausted by their hideous suffering, the hapless exiles took refuge from their world of darkness and confusion in the Kabbalah. It is only this mysterious science that can solve the riddle of their strange fate. For a thousand years they had been studying the Talmud and pondering over the speculations of philosophy but they failed to discover the meaning of their destiny. By the bewildered fugitives from Spain the Kabbalah was accepted as a prodigious way of escape, a wondrous sally into the Infinite when everything else seemed dark and hopeless.

Never was the Jewish scene so crowded with dreamers, visionaries, adventurers and apocalyptic prophets as during the years which followed the expulsion from Spain. Disappointed with the realities of their life they took to chasing shadows. From the obscurity of the Orient came

Dabid Reubeni,[37] a lean, swarthy, dashing and mysterious adventurer. Probably of German origin, he pretended to be a prince from the mythical country, Chebar, conceiving the amazing scheme of forming an alliance with Pope Clement VII to drive out the Turk from the Holy Land. His mission miscarried but Reubeni managed to save his life by a miracle. In Portugal a Marrano maiden, a sort of Jewish Joan of Arc, saw visions of Moses and the Prophets and ended her life at the stake. Another Marrano, Solomon Molko,[38] perhaps the most picturesque and romantic character in history, a glowing, tempestuous nature with Messianic delusions, a curious combination of hero, adventurer and mystic, set his heart on converting the Pope to Judaism. The Pope remained unreasonably obdurate, and poor Molko was consumed by the flames. It was during these restless and disturbed times that the Kabbalah was revived; not the speculative mysticism of the Spanish school, but a kind of "practical" Kabbalah which offered a working discipline of life by means of fasting, prayer, renunciation and the combination of letters calculated to hasten the advent of the Messiah.

Chapter II

DARKNESS AND DAWN

Poetic justice decreed that the Kabbalah should return to Palestine, the land where many centuries before it was conceived and born. The Turks proved more merciful to the Jews than the Christians, and the crescent offered them the asylum which the cross denied. As though to compensate them for the loss of Spain, Turkey opened the gates of Palestine to the fugitives from the Inquisition. It was not only the Spanish Jews who came and settled in the Holy Land, but Jews from many other lands who had no taste for the martyr's crown. Jewish writers, enthusiastic over their new-found freedom, wrote to their brethren in Europe glowing accounts of the mildness and tolerance of the Turkish rule in Palestine and invited them to come and join them, and "renew their inner life." [1] They did not need much coaxing. In a comparatively short time, Jewish communities sprang up all over Palestine, but particularly in Safed, an obscure and little known town in Upper Galilee of which neither the Bible nor the Talmud took much notice.

Before long, Safed became the most thriving Jewish community in Palestine, in many respects eclipsing the older and better known cities. While Jerusalem continued to hold its place in the affections of the Jews as the historic capital, Safed became the spiritual center of Palestine. Jews of all types and descriptions were to be found there—Talmudists and mystics, legalists and Kabbalists, philosophers and day-dreamers. It was a melting-pot of the East and West, of Jews from Spain and Portugal and their humbler brethren from Germany and

Poland. Men of clashing ideas and ideals were jostling each other in the crowded streets and synagogues of the little town situated in the mountain province of the country. While one was dreaming of a religious legislation that should regulate every detail of the life of the Jew, another was weaving mystic yarns looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Often the two impulses abided within one and the same breast, making the legislator also a philosopher and mystic. But whatever may have been their differences and disagreements, they had the same faith in the Torah and in the spiritual destiny of the Jewish people.

It was in Safed that the mystic dream took its most daring flight. From the very beginning the spiritual atmosphere of the community was keen and tense. The city was made up of settlers whose tragic experiences had made them scan the sky for signs and wonders. They read the Bible with an eye to the Promise, and despairing of finding it there, turned to the Kabbalah which was more exact and definite on the subject. There were Kabbalists in Safed who kept the mystic flame aglow—Moses Cordovero, a philosopher and mystic; Solomon Alkabez, a poet and Kabbalist, and Joseph Karo, perhaps the most curious combination of Talmudist, legalist and mystic, who wrote a code that guides the religious life of the Jews to this day yet availed himself of the services of a mentor angel and envied Solomon Molko his martyr-death.[2]

The mystical atmosphere of Safed was brought to excitement by the advent of Rabbi Isaac Luria.[3] He saved the Kabbalah from extinction by transplanting it into the hearts of his followers, who, in turn, set other hearts aflame with it. The "Practical Kabbalah," although already dimly foreshadowed by the Jews of Germany centuries before, may be said to have originated with him. The product of a lowered horizon, a child of pain and suffering, born amidst the harrowing fortunes of the Jews in Eastern Europe, the "Practical Kabbalah" influenced

the course of Jewish history for nearly four hundred years.

II

Rabbi Isaac Luria was the classic example of a mystic. He made poverty and solitude the rule of his life when his lot might have offered him wealth and society. He was born (1534) in Jerusalem and came of German ancestors; hence he was styled ARI, the "Lion," which is an abbreviation of Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac. He lost his father in early childhood and was taken by his mother to her wealthy brother in Cairo, the tax-farmer Mordecai Francis, under whose care he was brought up. After perfecting himself in the Talmudic lore he became dissatisfied on account of his mystical temperament with the scholastic career. When a copy of the Zohar fell into his possession he immersed himself in its study. He lived the life of a hermit, withdrawing from the society of his family and friends and retired to the loneliness of the desert where he devoted his time to prayers and ecstatic visions, visiting his home only on the Sabbath. He spoke little, except on the Sabbath and holy days, when his words were few and only in the Hebrew language.

The material world became completely dissolved for the young mystic who believed himself to be the Prophet Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah. In communion with few living men, he lived in an atmosphere peopled with spirits. He saw souls everywhere—hissing through the air, soaring through space, arising from the graves, wretched and miserable souls, powerless to lift themselves from the earth and ascend to their heavenly abode. His heart was filled with pity and compassion for them and he resolved to help them return to the throne of God. He was in communion with other souls as well, those of the Prophets and the sages of the Talmud, who, he fancied, made him the messenger of their words and work. He felt that the spirit-world had no secrets for him and

thought that by merely looking at a man he could read his life and foretell his destiny.

Meeting with little encouragement in Egypt and longing for companionship of fellow mystics, he settled with his cousin-wife and child in Safed (1569), a city of saints and mystics. Here he immediately gained a following. Among his friends and admirers were such men as Moses Cordovero and Joseph Karo, who, although profound scholars themselves and much older than Luria, nevertheless accepted him as their master in the mystic lore. Among his disciples was one Hayim Vital,[4] an Italian by birth, a dreamer like himself and a man of amazing industry and initiative, who became his secretary, apostle and Boswell. Luria organized a community of mystics, occupying with their families separate quarters, who visited from time to time the graves of the masters of the esoteric wisdom, where they imagined that they drew upon themselves their spirit and guidance.

Luria soon fancied himself as the Messiah of the tribe of Joseph, destined to herald the advent of Messiah the son of David.[5] On the Sabbath he dressed in white garments, the color of grace, and wore a quadruple coat, to symbolize the four letters of the Ineffable Name. His ministration in Safed, however, was very brief, lasting but six years, for he passed away at the age of thirty-eight. Yet, for the influence he had wielded few men can compare with him.

Rabbi Isaac Luria found the Kabbalah a mass of confusion and left it a more or less ordered system. It may be extravagant and fantastic but it has all the earmarks of a mystic way of life. Whatever foreign influences he picked up became transmuted in his hands, so as to harmonize with the spirit and genius of the Jewish people. Whether his system be accepted or rejected, it was the first attempt to create an esoteric philosophy after the Jewish pattern.[6]

The teachings of Luria were soon no longer confined

to the East but encircled the whole of the Jewish world. Enthusiastic disciples carried the germs of his doctrine first to Italy and then to other parts of the diaspora, till they became in a short time the popular practice of wide masses of Jews. The stern discipline of life which Luria demanded suited the peculiar conditions under which the Jews were living, and scholars and laymen responded to his requirements with enthusiastic approval.

Of all of Luria's pupils one man alone, Hayim Vital, was responsible for the spread of his master's faith. An enthusiast, and not without the dash of an adventurer, he made himself a life-long apostle of his preachings, extending his teacher's domain almost throughout the Jewish world. A man of unusual energy, and not unmindful of his own fame and interests, Vital knew how to exploit the genius of his master. He preached his teacher's gospel, copied his manuscripts, added to them much of his own, till, in the course of time, the whole of Jewry was ringing with the names and fame of both master and pupil. His success was almost instantaneous in all countries, but particularly in Poland, where the conditions of the times proved congenial for the reception of his teachings. After Hayim Vital came other followers of Luria, the "Lion's Whelps," as they were called, who fitted his system into the pattern of Talmudic Judaism, which obtained a following in almost all the great centers of the Jewish diaspora.

III

As already remarked, Luria came to the Kabbalah by way of the Zohar, although he may have been acquainted with the mystical writings of the Babylonian school which his family had brought with them from Germany. It was the key with which he unlocked the enchanted land of mysticism. Yet, while he accepted the Zohar, he was not dominated by it. He was its master, not its slave. The Zohar was both his text-book and point of departure. He

followed it without, at the same time, losing his own sense of direction. He scanned its pages and mastered its contents without allowing it to overwhelm him. In his hands the Zohar was not reproduced but recreated; not slavishly followed but creatively reborn. He let the book pass through the crucible of his own mind before assimilating any of its bewildering fantasies. He was himself a son of freedom, with Palestine as his birthplace, Egypt as his home, and the descendant of an ancestry that looked back to Rashi as its progenitor. It was not desperation that drove him to the Kabbalah; not personal suffering that made him embrace its doctrine. What he was looking for was not so much an escape as a way of life, and the result was that he evolved a doctrine both amazing and novel. Although he built upon the old foundation, the edifice he erected was, in many respects, unlike the former structure.

Luria has something to say upon almost every Kabbalistic subject; physics and metaphysics, God and man, angels and demons, the living and the dead, this world and the next world; but he is particularly concerned with the fate and destiny of the human soul. Like all the mystics, souls were his greatest interest. The world for him held nothing that is material; everything was ablaze with souls. Souls were the constant companions of his sleeping and waking hours; they form the most conspicuous element in his teachings. He reads in their light the riddle of the universe, the problem of the ills and woes of the world, the sufferings and destiny of the Jews and even marital felicity. Luria accepts with certain modifications the Zoharistic doctrine of the soul, not only because it opened for him vast fields of mystical speculations, but chiefly because the soul is to him the keystone of all the religious and social problems which affect human life.

According to the Lurian school,[7] all the souls that were destined for the human race were created from the various organs of Adam. But, just as there are in the human

body superior and inferior organs, so there are also superior and inferior souls, according to the organs with which they are associated. Thus, there are souls of the brain, souls of the head, souls of the eye, souls of the hand, souls of the feet, etc., each soul containing a *Nizuz,* or "Spark," from its original source of creation. The souls were sent down with a perfect free will and unlimited faculty to develop and enrich the germs of their supernal endowments. But the sin of Adam caused a confusion among the souls, so that even the purest souls are not without a taint of evil which degrades their higher nature and makes it impossible for them to rise to their Creator. Another term of life by means of rebirth is, therefore, given them to effect their union with God. Such rebirth, or *Gilgul,* takes place not only through the bodies of men but also animals and even inanimate objects. It is thus that human beings are often found to display the animal characteristics of lust, cruelty and blood-thirstiness, and trees and flowers endowed with the qualities of growth and beauty. It is in this way that Luria developed the Kabbalistic doctrine of Reincarnation, or Transmigration of Souls. *Ibbur,*[8] or "Impregnation," is Luria's doctrine of the additional soul, which, callous to earthly temptation, is given to man by divine grace, so that the sinning soul may ascend to the aerial abode.

The problem of the discordant, or divided lives, which modern psychology explains as the result of acquired characteristics from antagonistic ancestors, Luria explains on the basis of the confusion of souls. Generally, the souls of men transmigrate into the bodies of men and those of women into the bodies of women. But there are exceptions when the soul of a man enters the bodily habitation of a woman or the soul of a woman finds lodgment in the frame of a man; in which case the unbalanced lives of the feminine men and the masculine women are evolved. It is this discord of souls which, according to Luria, is responsible for marital unhappiness.[9]

His theory of Impregnation gave rise in later times to the pernicious belief in *Dybbuk,*[10] or "Possession," which prevailed, and still prevails, among the Jews of the Orient and of Eastern Europe. According to this theory, the air is swarming with unfortunate and tormented souls, which, because they are not clothed with bodies, are plagued by evil spirits that give them no rest and whose only escape is to take possession of some human being. Persons who are afflicted with the habitation of such souls, endure acute suffering, lose their individuality, become multiple personalities, and live and act as though they were quite other persons.

Luria pondered over the misfortunes of his people and the cause of their suffering, but found that the reason of their distress lay not in God, but in the world that is encrusted in *Kelipah,* or the "shell" of sin. The *Kelipah* will disappear with the coming of the Messiah, who will establish the world on the basis of a new moral order. Until that time comes, man must assist the hands of Providence by the rectitude of his life and obedience to the precepts of the Torah, which can be accomplished by renouncing the joys and pleasures of the earth and devoting himself to prayer, fasting and acts of penance.

The characteristic feature of Isaac Luria's system is the relation he tried to discover between God and nature. Between God and the universe he found a missing link. The imperfect universe tallies poorly with the Perfect Deity. If God fills all space, how did the material existence originate? Luria attempted to solve this apparent contradiction by formulating the doctrine of *Zimzum,* or "Concentration," which is Talmudic not only in germ but in its terminology as well.[11] His own statement on the subject is so clear, that it is worth while quoting it in full. "Thou must know," he says, "that the En-Sof fills the infinite space, and there was no space outside of it. When the Creator decided that his attributes should manifest themselves, it was found necessary for the En-Sof to

concentrate his own being, and leave an empty space for the creation of the world."

Prayer, as may be expected, was to Luria the main function of life, there being according to him no prayer in which man by reason of his close communion with God, does not become the receptacle of the new Divine light and a new outflow of Divine mercy. He saw in the lack of proper devotion during prayer the great obstacle in the way of the redemption of Israel.

There is a fine, elevated ethical tone moving through the mystical teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria. Not even his severest critics can suppress their admiration for the uprightness of his life and the nobility of his moral precepts. The demands he made upon the moral and ethical life of his pupils atone for many of his fantastic extravagances. The man who taught the doctrine of balanced souls demanded also rectitude and purity as conditions of the balanced life. He emphasized the virtue of humility and insisted upon the curbing of the temper. By dwelling upon the inwardness of the ceremonial precepts, he endowed religion with a new spiritual meaning. He taught that when a *Mitzvah,* "commandment," is inwardly performed, it becomes a seraph that illumines one's way to heaven. It was due to his influence that the prayers of the later Kabbalists became devout and rapturous exercises, not mere lifeless mumblings of words, for he taught that only such prayers possess the strength to rise to the throne of God.

IV

Although the Jews of Poland were like their brethren of the West in most respects, they differed from them in that, unlike the latter, they did not thrust themselves upon Poland, but were actually invited to come and live there.[12] This was sufficient to give their whole history different shape and color. Migrating from the west of Europe, principally Germany, Poland soon became one

of the greatest mass-centers of the Jews in the world, with an economic and cultural life all their own. They organized their self-government, conducted their affairs and managed their religious and judicial matters without interference from the Polish authorities. At first, the Catholic clergy ran true to form, organized pogroms and incited mob-violence against them. But this reversion to the savagery of the West ceased as soon as the Jews became a vital factor in the economic life of the country.

The Poles needed the Jews and could not do without them. Poland was a feudal aristocracy, in which the petty nobility maintained their rank and standing not by their own productive labor but by what they could press out of the sweat and toil of their serfs or impoverished peasants. They needed business and executive acumen, of which they were devoid. The Jews were reputed to possess the precise qualities they themselves lacked. Their international communication and reputed genius for business and experience in handling big affairs made them welcome aids of the impoverished Polish nobility. Besides, the Jews served a political purpose as well, for they acted as a kind of buffer between the Poles and the Russians on the one hand and the townspeople and the village peasantry on the other.

The Jews influenced the economic life of Poland almost from the outset. They managed the estates, collected taxes, stimulated trade, developed industry till the country flourished under their influence. The Poles, priest-ridden, heirs to the traditional dislike of Jews, hated their economic benefactors, yet were compelled to curb their passion because they alone stood between the prosperity and the poverty of their country. It is thus that it became comparatively an easy matter for the Jews to wrest from the Polish kings and nobles concessions which were not possessed by their brethren in other lands. Hence Poland speedily became a kind of Jewish Utopia which their brethren of the West envied no little.

With the growth of their material prosperity came also a widening of their intellectual horizons, for Poland became not only a mass-center of Jews but also a center of Judaism. Academies rivalling in some respects the old schools of learning, flourished in many parts of the country, and the printing presses could not produce enough copies of the Talmud to meet the large demand. So popular did the study of the Talmud become that, according to one authority, there was not a community of fifty Jews without at least thirty scholars. The Talmud was not only studied, but cultivated; not alone was it piously read, but its domain was enlarged and widened by original researches and contributions. The great triumvirate of Shalom Shakhnah, Solomon Luria and Moses Isserles established a hegemony of learning in Poland which was respected by the Jewry of all Europe. Thus, the Jews of Germany, recognizing the scholastic superiority of their Polish brethren, availed themselves of their men of learning for the spiritual leadership of their own communities.[13]

Wherever Talmudic learning flourished there also the Kabbalah stood in high esteem. It is, therefore, not surprising to find the occult science which was regarded by the orthodox Jews as a counter movement to philosophy, making considerable progress in Poland.[14] As mysticism was introduced to Germany in the ninth century by way of Italy, so was the Kabbalah brought into Poland from Palestine by the same medium. It did not take very long for the Kabbalah to take root in its new soil. Thousands quickly became its adherents. The Jews of Poland were learned and pious, but their piety was formal and their learning based upon hair-splitting casuistry, allowing for little play of the imagination. It was learning which appealed to the brain rather than to the heart of the people, burying vast stores of scholarship beneath endless interpretations, debates, speculations and theories. They were ignorant of the sciences, innocent of poetry, and it was

only after they had reached the years of discretion that their young men were allowed to read the Bible. Thousands of Jews who were thirsting for spiritual sustenance rather than intellectual exercises, turned from the Hallakha to mysticism, resulting in a quiet struggle between the Talmud and the Kabbalah.

Many of the great rabbis became aware of the crisis; were hurt by the neglect of the Talmud, and grew envious of the popularity of the Kabbalah. Even so enlightened a scholar as Rabbi Moses Isserles, who prided himself on his mastery of the *Moreh* and was fond of quoting Aristotle,[15] could not conceal his resentment and remarked bitterly: "Many masses of the people have taken to the study of the Kabbalah. Not only the educated, but also such who do not know their right from left, who live in darkness, and cannot explain the meaning of the weekly portion of the Torah, or understand a passage of Rashi."

But the trend of the age was distinctly toward mysticism; the heated opposition of the rabbis could not check its progress. Many rabbis, seeing the inroads of the Kabbalah, tried to effect a synthesis of Rabbinism and mysticism and thereby established harmony between the two. Such a man was Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz who, by his work, *Shnei Luhoth Habrith,* "The Two Tables of the Covenant," [16] endeavored to squeeze the Kabbalistic method into the scheme of Talmudic Judaism by his ethico-mystical book that enjoyed unflagging interest for several hundred years.[17]

V

But events, dark and sad, soon happened which helped to establish the supremacy of the Lurian Kabbalah beyond dispute. Catastrophic as is the story which we are about to narrate, it did not come suddenly or without ample warning. The Jews continued to serve the economic interests of their Polish masters; but in so doing, they jeopardized their own safety. The empty coffers of

the nobility they were helping to fill spelled their own doom. By acting as instruments of oppression they were creating against themselves the opposition of the downtrodden which, in the end, proved their own undoing. The oppressive taxes and forced labor made the Polish peasants turn against their masters, and, helpless to wreak their vengeance upon them, vented their anger on the Jews. The dormant forces of hate which were accumulating suddenly leaped forth in a white passion, destroying both principal and agent.

But the torch that was applied to the stored-up explosives came from another source. In addition to incurring the animosity of the Polish peasants and workers, the Jews became involved in a strained relation between the Poles and the Russian Orthodox Christians in Ukrainia. In the borderland east of Ukrainia lived a community of Cossacks who professed the religion of the Greek Orthodox Church. Formally belonging to Poland, they were treated by their Polish overlords with all the contempt and arrogance of a conquering nation. Members of another faith, they were economically oppressed as well as persecuted for their faith. The Poles taxed not only their lands and cattle but their very churches and religious rites and customs. Thus, Jewish tax-farmers held the keys to their houses of worship which could not be opened for the christening of their children or for marriage and burial services without their permission.[18]

Neither the Jews nor the Poles realized that they were storing up dangerous explosives which would one day burst forth with a terrific force. Unaware of the coming events, the Jews settled in the territory in large numbers, in many instances enriching themselves as the tools of their Polish masters on the toil of the Cossack pariahs. As middlemen, the land the peasant tilled, the meadows on which his cattle grazed, the mill that ground his grain, and the rivers in which he went fishing were all operated by Jews. Although the Jews were only executing the will

of their greedy landlords, the oppressed Russians did not draw a line of demarcation between the oppressor and his tool, and hated both alike.

For a long time all went well, for the fear of the Polish magnates held the Cossacks in submission. But when, in 1648, Bogdan Chemelnicki was elected hetman, he declared an insurrection against the economic oppression and political tyranny of the hated Poles. Between the two opposing forces the Jew, an alien in faith, a stranger in race and nationality, and an instrument of oppression of the Poles and the Russians found himself hated by both. The results of the Cossack uprising are too terrible to tell. While the Russians were visiting upon the Jews the frightful wrath of their vengeance, the Poles, who despised them no less than the insurgent Cossacks, were in no hurry to help them.

It is estimated that during the decade of 1648 to 1658 something like seven hundred Jewish communities were wiped out, in many not a soul was left alive, the slain running at the lowest into one hundred thousand. There was no safety on the open land, for they were hunted and hounded wherever they could be found, and there was no safety in the water, for those who threw themselves into the rivers were fired upon by the pursuing hordes till the waters were red with human blood. Synagogues were destroyed, victims were barbarously done to death, many flayed and buried alive, or mutilated and left to the agony of a lingering end. Married and unmarried women were violated in the presence of their menfolk and those who were comely were carried away. Whole communities of Jews died by their own hand in order not to fall into the hands of the human beasts, and those who managed to escape fled from the sickening scene of horror half-mad with fear and terror, wandering over the frontiers of Germany, Holland, Italy and Turkey.[19]

VI

The Jews met their tragic fate with the same mystic, stubborn faith that characterized similar tragedies before. But no such catastrophe can befall a people without leaving sad and depressing results behind. It was but natural to expect that men who had suddenly lost their hold upon life should be clutching at every shadow and illusion that held out the least promise of relief and succor. Their physical and mental suffering made them ripe for all sorts of dreams, fancies and delusions. The spiritual life of the people sank to its lowest level. The Lurian Kabbalah triumphed; thousands of Jews were living as though in a spirit-world, believing themselves to be haunted and hounded by ghosts and demons from which they were vainly trying to escape. Convinced that their sufferings were the pains which heralded the coming of the Messiah, many endeavored to hasten his advent by making general assaults upon heaven by means of prayer, fasting and the severest acts of penance. Then, when all their efforts failed, and the Redeemer did not put in his appearance, some of the more fanatic among them thought they discovered traces of the Messiah in their own persons and proclaimed themselves the Son of David.

This it was which made possible the saddest, at the same time the most colorful, pageantry in Jewish history—the advent of Sabbatai Zebi. Were he ever so great a fraud and charlatan, he only acted the rôle for which the events of the times prepared him. Rabbi Akiba took the Promise literally and proclaimed Bar Kokhaba as the Messiah, as did other men under similar pressure of circumstances. If there was any truth in the Promise, what time was more propitious for the coming of the Messiah than the period which was universally regarded as *Heble Moshiah,*[20] "the days of anguish," which are supposed to accompany the advent of the Redeemer. Kabbalists

studied the ancient texts, made calculations and announced their conclusions. Earth and sky were crowded as it were with signs and portents, and the author of a well-known book, *Yeven Metzulah,* "The Depth of the Abyss," wrote on the title page of his work, "In the Year of the Coming of the Messiah."

Not only the Jewish world but Christendom as well felt that it was on the eve of a great apocalyptic change. In many countries of Europe the second coming of Christ was hourly expected and preparations were made for his advent.[21] When Sabbatai Zebi appeared, he was accepted not only by the Kabbalists but by the sober students of the Talmud as well. Jewish scholars all over the world nodded their heads in approval of his claims; and when a delegation of rabbis was sent to him to examine his credentials, they came back convinced and converted. It was no mere coincidence that one and the same year, 1648, which marked the bloody massacre of the Jews in Poland was the year the Zohar predicted for the coming of the Messiah as well as the time in which Sabbatai Zebi had revealed himself. These three incidents are connected by more than the mere slender thread of pure chance. The exhausted patience of the people demanded a visual demonstration of their centuries of waiting and hoping; the promised redemption could not any longer be postponed.

Far from deploring the Sabbatarian delusion, Jews should be grateful for it, for it may not have been altogether without a blessing in disguise. If not for that momentary illusion, which spread a rainbow of romance over their otherwise miserable and wretched existence, who can tell what might have been the consequence of such strong impulses as were stirred up by the tragic years of 1648 to 1658? Without the staging of that grand spectacle, which served to make the Jews forget their sorrows, they might have sunk into a still deeper abyss of despair. As it was, the literature of that period is filled with the gloomiest reflections bordering on melancholia.

VII

Twenty years separate the death of Sabbatai Zebi from the birth of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. To the Jews they were years of sorrow and humiliation. The disappointment that followed had a deep and paralyzing effect upon the whole of Jewry. While the Jews were everywhere mocked and laughed at, a feeling of despondency that took many years to overcome settled upon them. They reproached themselves for having leaned on so broken a reed, and great rabbis spent much time in prayers and fasting for encouraging their flocks in the delusion. When the messiahship of Bar Kokhba was shattered amidst blood and national ruin it left thrilling and heroic memories behind, whereas this time they had nothing to console them for their shame and bitterness.

As if their measure of suffering was not full enough, the Jews were soon called upon to witness another hideous spectacle. Just at the time when the name and memory of Sabbatai Zebi were beginning to fade, another imposter, Jacob Frank,[22] a vile and unscrupulous adventurer, appeared upon the scene to claim the crown which had been so rudely shaken from the head of the Prophet of Smyrna.

A native of Poland, without character or learning, Jacob Frank lived long enough in the Eastern atmosphere of Turkey to have absorbed something of its easy and glamorous life. He made friends as he moved about with the grace and elegance of an Eastern potentate, always carrying a full purse, the contents of which he distributed with condescending bounty.

He evolved a doctrine that was a sort of hodge-podge of Christian theology and Kabbalistic superstition. Taking advantage of the confused state of Jewish life, he resolved to fish in its troubled waters. He appeared suddenly in Poland and presented himself as the Sabbatai Zebi incarnate, adding a touch of riotous living to his fantastic claims. He was loudly cheered as the Messiah

risen from the grave. A skillful artificer, he understood how to manipulate Kabbalistic texts to give him an air of learning. His aim was not only to establish a new sect but also a new religion, one in which neither the Bible nor the Talmud but the Zohar would be the book of the covenant. He might have succeeded had it not been for the revolting indecencies of which he and his sect became guilty. As it was, the game did not last long, and, like Sabbatai Zebi, Frank not only betrayed Judaism himself, but carried many of his followers with him.

As before, the betrayal shook the whole of Jewry. Long and bitter controversies, with the anathemas and curses of the synagogue and leading rabbis, followed. In the resulting house-cleaning, great and honored names under suspicion of sectarianism were involved. Even the purity of the women who were lured by the Frankist orgy was questioned. As a consequence of this latest heresy the reputation of the Kabbalah was severely damaged. It became clear that a wall had to be thrown around a doctrine containing such dangerous material. Eminent rabbis met in solemn assembly and laid restrictions on the study of its holy but dangerous books.[28]

There were forces of dissolution that were operating within the Jewish household in quite another direction. As a result of the untoward circumstances came an intellectual enfeeblement that was especially marked in the works of the so-called Jewish scholars. Perhaps no hour was darker for the Jews of Poland than the one that looked forward to the beginning of the Hassidic movement.

The dawn of the eighteenth century, when signs of betterment were beginning to make themselves felt everywhere, found the Jews of Eastern Europe plunged into intellectual darkness from which they were slow in rousing themselves. In the most fateful hour they found themselves leaderless; many of the so-called leaders themselves led astray and stumbling at every step. In many instances the rabbis were leaders of their communities in

name only, the real power residing in the hands of ignorant but wealthy local autocrats. The scandals in which rabbis were involved became so shocking that many an important community decided to dispense with the post of rabbi altogether in order to obviate its attending evils.[24]

The Council of Four Lands which for one hundred and fifty years figured as a directive force in Jewish affairs, was on the point of dissolution and its place was taken by chaos and confusion. One of the last ordinances of this highly important rabbinical synod was a helpless plea for peace in the face of local quarrels that threatened to disrupt the communal life of the Jews and shame them in the eyes of the Gentiles.[25] With the collapse of their self-government came a violent shaking up of the whole community-structure of the Jews in Poland.

VIII

The classical age of Jewish learning passed its zenith in Poland; its place was taken by a less exalted casuistry which was as profitless as it was uninspiring. Scholarship ceased to be original and became subtle and sophistical, often degenerating into useless and futile discussions about things which had no practical relation to the needs of the times. The Jews of Poland shrank into their shell and shut themselves up against the world. They built up around themselves a sort of spiritual stability which was calculated to shield them against the consequences of physical assault; but it was not a stability that contained within it the germs of creative life. Graetz described the spiritual leaders of Poland as pitiful figures, with their heads crammed with useless knowledge, yet otherwise as innocent and helpless as children.[26] Thus, during the years that followed the catastrophic events of 1648, there were rabbis who were busy writing books on sacrifices and the Temple ritual!

No attempts were made to instruct and enlighten the people as they were passing from one absurdity to an-

other, from one superstition to another. When sermons were delivered in the synagogues, they were intended not so much for the education of the masses as to impress the more learned part of the audience with the cleverness with which scriptural and Talmudic texts were juggled. While the so-called great rabbis were busy in building up mountains of "scholarship" upon the point of a needle, the feelings and emotions of the common people were neglected to the degree of starvation. As a result, the religious life of the masses became encrusted with all kinds of bizarre rites, customs and superstitions. A system of Judaism dry and formal, without warmth or inspiration, in which none but the strictly learned had a part, was evolved. The leaders and their flocks steadily grew away from each other, till, in the course of time, there was little communication between them.

The years of neglect reaped their pitiful toll. There is no more melancholy chapter in the history of the Jews in Poland than the years that witnessed the breaking up of the eighteenth century. The pure faith of the Bible and the intellectual discipline of the Talmud gave way to a religion that was gross and superstitious, exacting obedience by the paralyzing fear which it spread over the hearts of the simple believers. It affected all classes of Jews, learned and simple alike. The atmosphere of the ghetto became thick with fancied spirits and demons. The Jew felt himself haunted by ghosts and apparitions at every step. They possessed him; they tormented him; they surrounded him on all sides without rest or surcease. They tortured his body; they twisted his soul; they racked the little ones in their cradles; they troubled the student at his books. They were a terror-driven people facing a ghost world. They looked upon a world that terrified and mystified them. Like children frightened by darkness, they peopled the world about them with ghosts and demons. In vacant fields, in lonely woods, in gloomy cemeteries, the Jew felt as though everywhere the dark spirit-world was whispering to him.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, a Jewish writer reports: "There is no country where Jews are so much given to mystical fancies, devil-hunting, talismans and exorcisms of evil spirits as they are in Poland." [27] A literature, called *Mussar,* originally intended for the edification and instruction of the unlearned masses, developed at this time, contributing to foster a morbid state of mind by its wild and exaggerated appeals to fear.[28] The picture of the Last Judgment, with its hosts of demons awaiting the souls of the sinners which these books portrayed, spread a panic of fear and terror over their readers. Thus, a book which became very popular in those days, contains the following admonition: "O, man, wert thou to know how many demons are thirsting for thy blood, thou wouldst abandon thyself entirely, with heart and soul, to the Almighty." [29] It was on this kind of sickly literature that large masses of Jews were being fed, or, rather, tormented.

To free themselves from their oppressing fears became the single obsession of the Jews of Poland. Not being able to do it themselves, they resorted to magicians, sorcerers and religious enchanters, who, because of their supposed superior skill and learning, were believed to be experts in the gentle art of spirit-chasing. The man who could cast out an evil spirit or exorcise a demon, was hailed as a saint and hero. Such "saints" and "heroes" became exceedingly popular, first in Germany, and then in Poland. They went by the name of *Baale Shem,*[30] or men who, by their manipulation of the letters which spelled out the Ineffable Name, were believed to be able to exercise power over the spirits. The Baal Shem represented a kind of mixture of quack doctor, Kabbalist and medicine man. He wrote amulets, prescribed empiric medicine, and engaged in driving out evil spirits.

The most general practice of the medicine man was a crude variety of what we should call to-day psychotherapy —a treatment that has its influence upon the mind of the

patient. The medicine man in treating his patient often tried to frighten the spirits away. He put on a costume that was bizarre and fantastic. The Talith, phylacteries, white robes, black candles, the ram's horn, and other such solemn synagogue articles played their part in the ceremony of ghost chasing. The medicine man, or in this instance, the Baal Shem, shouted, threatened, cajoled, pleaded, read psalms, or magic incantations before the patient. In many cases the patients improved; in some they were actually cured. They were either those whose ailment was mental, or such who would have got well anyway. But the Baal Shem did not discriminate; neither did his followers. Such "cures" established for their astute practitioners a reputation which made them famous. Solomon Maimon tells of one such man who possessed a knowledge of medicine, and was so clever in his game as to become a formidable competitor to the regular physicians.

The old connection between magic and religion was thus revived. A system of magical rites and practices, of prayers and incantations, calculated to ward off the effects of evil spirits, hateful and repugnant to the spirit of Judaism, came into existence. The rabbis were jealous of the Baal Shem and frequently emulated his example. The function of the religious leader became associated with that of the sorcerer, and the writing of amulets became a more profitable occupation than the writing of learned books. Whether this new accomplishment was forced upon the rabbis or was freely accepted by them is not known, but there were a number of spiritual leaders in those days who practiced the art of amulet-writing and chasing out of demons.[31] Indeed, many rabbis attained such fame and popularity in this calling that, not being able to meet the demand themselves, they employed the assistance of scribes and secretaries to help them in their work.

IX

A slightly higher, but equally pernicious type of religious fanatic were those who deluded themselves into the belief that by storming the throne of God by means of demonstrative prayers, fasting and self-inflicted torture, they would hasten the coming of the Messiah. Although invariably disappointed, the superstition was too deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the Jews to be discouraged by defeat or failure. To mortify the flesh became an ideal to which thousands surrendered themselves with joyous enthusiasm. The Lurian Kabbalah was practiced to the very letter, with all the rigorous demands it made upon the practitioners.

To destroy the passions of the flesh, sometimes together with the body, became the practice of a large number of men. While they did not emulate the example of the Christian saints and anchorites who lived in caves and on pillars, or roamed about naked over the mountain sides living off herbage like cattle, the attempt of trying to redeem the world for the coming of the Messiah became a popular pastime in those days. Almost every form of asceticism was indulged in. Men denied themselves the normal desires of life; ate little, slept little, talked little, and prayed hour after hour till their eyes grew dim and their voices hoarse. They were what Professor William James called "sick souls," but sicker still was the generation in which they lived and the condition of the times that produced them.

The oft-quoted Solomon Maimon tells in his "Autobiography" of one of such ascetic. "Joseph of Kletzk," he writes, "proposed nothing less than the hastening of the advent of the Messiah. To this end he performed strict penance; fasted, rolled in snow, undertook night watches, and similar severities. By all sorts of such aberrations he believed that he was enabled to overcome the hosts of evil spirits who kept guard on the Messiah, and

who threw obstacles in the way of his coming. To these exercises he added at last many Kabbalistic fooleries—fumigations, conjurations, and similar practices—till, at length, he lost his wits on the subject, believing that he really saw spirits with his eyes open, calling each of them by name. He would often beat about him, smash windows and stoves, under the idea that these were his foes." [32]

From the same source: "A Jewish scholar at that time, well known on account of his piety, Simon of Lubish, had undertaken the severest exercise of penance. He had already carried out the *T'shubath Hakanah*—'the penance of Kanah'—which consisted in fasting daily for six years, and avoiding for supper anything that comes from living being (flesh, milk, honey, etc.). He had practiced *Galuth,* that is, continuous wandering in which the penitent is not allowed to remain for two days in the same place; and, in addition, he had worn a hair-shirt next to his skin. But he felt that he would not be doing enough for the satisfaction of his conscience, unless he further observed the *T'shubath Hamishkal*—the penance of weights—which requires a particular kind of penance proportionate to every sin. But when he found by calculation that his sins were too many to be atoned in this way, he took into his head to starve himself to death. After he had spent some time in this process, he came in his wanderings to the place where my father lived, and, without anybody in the house knowing, went into the barn, where he fell upon the ground in utter faintness. My father came by chance into the barn and found the man whom he had long known, lying nearly dead on the ground with a Zohar in his hand. As he knew well what sort of a man he was, he brought him at once all sorts of food, but the man would make no use of them in any way. My father came several times and repeated his request that Simon should take something, but it was of no avail. My father had to attend to something in the house, whereupon Simon, to escape from

importunity, extended all his strength, raised himself up, went out of the barn, and, at last, out of the village. When my father came back into the barn again, and found the man no longer there, he ran after him and found him lying dead not far from the village. The affair was generally made known among the Jews, and Simon became a saint." [33]

X

While heavy clouds were settling over the Jews of Poland, the position of Judaism was being threatened from still another quarter. It was the time that preceded the German Enlightenment. Although not intended by its pioneers, it introduced a wave of religious nihilism which seriously menaced the future of Judaism. A shallow rationalism was offered in the place of the piety and learning of the centuries. Like hungry beggars the Jews of Europe fell upon the few intellectual crumbs that were handed out to them, not stopping to examine whether the food would sustain or kill them.

The proverbial Jewish hunger for knowledge was turned into other channels; it was no longer the learning of the Bible or the Talmud, but the secular wisdom of the Gentiles which was held out to them as containing the seeds of salvation. It was a kind of learning that was shallow and superficial, bringing information without knowledge, erudition without culture, and polish without refinement. From Germany the crisis in Judaism spread to other countries, not sparing the Jews of Eastern Europe, until then strongly entrenched in the traditions of their religion. The walls of the ghetto were crumbling, but with them also the walls of the Holy Law.

In the salons of Berlin the young Jewish intellectuals were laughing Judaism to scorn with their brilliant and caustic wit. Judaism, in the words of Heine, became a "misfortune" which the Jews were hastening to wash away with the baptismal waters of the nearest church;

and those who lacked the courage to make their own flight from the synagogue, were eager to save at least their children from the handicap of their Jewish birth. Heine realized in the depth of his heart the pain and humiliation of the situation, and poured out his scorching scorn over the heads of the Neo-Christians,[34] openly confessing that he felt greater kinship with the uncouth wretchedness of "The Polish Jew with his filthy fur, his infested beard, his garlic-laden breath, and his jargon," [35] than with his so-called modern counterpart. There must have been many others who felt as he did; yet it was too late, for they had already gone the way from which there was no return.

The Polish *Haskalah* was half-sister to the German Enlightenment and it inherited all its faults. The synagogue was attacked in Poland with the same savage ruthlessness as it was assailed in Berlin, except that the diatribes of the Haskalah were all the harder to bear because they were written in the Hebrew language which the Jews consider holy. As Germanization was held out as an ideal to the Jews of the Fatherland, Polonization and Russification were preached as the path of salvation of their brethren in Eastern Europe. The Hebrew language was cultivated, poets composed their verses and novelists wrote their tales and stories, but the goal was not Hebraism but Gentilism.[36]

If Rabbinism erred in one direction, Haskalah failed in the other; the mistakes of both proved equally harmful to the cause and future of the Jewish people. The smug complacency of the one and the shallow rationalism of the other threatened to uproot and destroy what took centuries to build and plant. It was on the whole a leaderless age, without vision or direction. There was no seething, surging ground-well of popular emotion, no great prophet to voice in fresh ways the elemental hunger of the Jewish heart; no man to clothe the spiritual nakedness of the Jews with new and shining garments and give

Judaism fresh content. Had this situation continued, no one can tell what the outcome might have been.

XI

It was in this gloomy atmosphere that Israel Baal Shem Tob, BeShT (abbreviation for Baal Shem Tob) as he is popularly called, was born and Hassidim came into existence. The events that followed will be told in the following pages, but it may be stated here, that the hunger for pure and simple faith without intellectual sophistications which was stirring in the hearts of the Jewish people for hundreds of years was revived by him with the zeal and earnestness of religious passion. Never had a movement spread with such lightning-like rapidity as the one that was created under the spell of his influence. The spark of enthusiasm that was blown by him into life, grew into a flame that encircled the whole of Jewry.

Sabbatai Zebi and Jacob Frank commanded large followings, but they marched under the banner of messiahship and dazzled the eyes of the people with the pomp and glamour of Oriental magnificence. Isaac Luria made a deep impression, but he came from the Nile valley with something like the halo of a superman about him. Here, on the other hand, was man of humble origin, with nothing to distinguish him from the wretched peasants who were his companions, yet, in a comparatively short time, created a following as did few other founders of religious movements. While Sabbatai Zebi lived to be repudiated by his own generation, and Jacob Frank was cursed by his contemporaries, Israel Baal Shem Tob proclaimed a doctrine that became enshrined as a living faith in the hearts of millions of men in almost all parts of the world.

With Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob a new religious philosophy was born, which, while it clung to the traditions of the past, breathed the spirit of the dawning day. Almost pagan in his joy and love of life, he preached in an age of gloomy superstition the doctrine of a healthy and robust

optimism. By breaking down the barriers between the natural and the supernatural he made it possible for man to feel himself at home in the world. The world of Israel Baal Shem Tob was not filled with the hostile and menacing forces of ghosts and demons that had to be propitiated by means of prayers, charms and amulets, but it was a kind, gentle and friendly universe. Rabbi Israel taught his disciples that life is not to be shunned or avoided but loved and enjoyed—a beautiful and happy experience one must taste and covet, not fear. Whereas the Lurian God is a kind of Eastern potentate, remote and inaccessible, ruling His subjects with an iron hand, mercilessly punishing them for the slightest infraction of His will, Rabbi Israel democratized God, making Him a kind, gentle and companionable Deity whose dwelling place is not in the distant heaven but in the humblest human heart as well as in the great stellar system. As a result, man no longer approached his Maker in fear and trembling, but lived on intimate terms with Him.

It was these things that made Israel Baal Shem Tob so novel a figure and Hassidism so great and revolutionary a force, which gave it popularity among the masses and, later, standing and reputation among the learned. A new world was opened up before them. The people learned to worship God with an enthusiasm they had not felt before. Judaism was no longer a tradition of mechanical laws and ceremonies, but a great spiritual adventure. From the mysticism of the Bible to that of the Zohar, from the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria to the Hassidism of Israel Baal Shem may, indeed, be a far cry, but inwardly, expressing the eternal longing of the Jewish heart to be at one with God, they obeyed one and the same impulse. The mystic sparks, for untold generations present in the hearts of sages and prophets, were concentrated in the soul of the humble teacher of Medziboz, into a great and luminous flame, bringing cheer and happiness to millions of hearts.

Chapter III

ISRAEL BAAL SHEM: THE MAN AND THE IMAGE

It is a pity that Thomas Carlyle had never heard of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob for he would have found in him a man after his own heart. His character and personality might have overcome the aversion which the Scotch philosopher felt for his race. No other man had a better claim to be included in Carlyle's "Heroes and Hero Worship" than this unique and striking founder of the Hassidic sect. Israel possessed all the elements of greatness which Carlyle demanded of truly great men. He was hero, poet, priest and prophet, and by many of his followers he is worshiped as though he were a divine being as well. He had the simplicity of a child, yet the depth and earnestness of a man. He never wrote a book, yet many books have been written about him. He never declaimed a line of poetry, yet hundreds of folk-songs have originated in his name. He was not an orator, but spoke with the eloquence of one possessed of God. He was not an artist, for he came from a race which has a religious abhorrence for the arts, yet a new art movement is being created under the spell of his influence. He was not a rabbi, never held an official position, but by thousands of men he is proclaimed as the Grand Lama of the sect and movement he founded. Few men in history stirred up such enthusiasm and created so large a following as this obscure and humble Jew of a remote and little known corner in Europe. In a comparatively short time he was followed by thousands and his name became known in all

the great Jewries in Europe. Two hundred years separate this generation from that of Israel Baal Shem Tob, but, as a legendary figure, he has already taken his place with some of the leading legendary characters in history.

The founder of no other religious sect has so thoroughly identified himself with the faith he created as Israel Baal Shem Tob. Hassidism has been described as a revolutionary uprising on the part of an emotional and uneducated class of Jews against the tyranny and oppression of inherited rights and established traditions. Of this protest Israel Baal Shem Tob was the living symbol and embodiment. He adumbrated in his own life and character all that the dumb and inarticulated masses felt and experienced. No other man could have created the Hassidic movement; no other man could have infused into it the same warmth and fervor. No one else could have drawn to it so many hearts, or inspired the simple and trusting village folks with such faith and confidence. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob was himself Hassidism incarnate. He made the movement; he created it; he not only set the flame aglow, but discovered also the method by which it was kept alive. Founded by a less sincere and earnest man, Hassidism might have degenerated into a kind of religious quackery and charlatanry. Originated by more learned men, it might have become a great and learned movement, with many books and an intensive literature, but with little warmth or inwardness. But Hassidism was spun from the heart and not from the brain, from the feelings and emotions of its master, not from his mind and intellect. He was accused of ignorance, of innocence of the conventional trappings of knowledge which go by the name of learning; but the faith which he founded was intended for the simple and illiterate folk, for the water-carriers and mule-drivers. It was not to be a system of doctrines to be discussed and argued about in long and involved debates, but a faith and conviction to be lived by.

II

Myths and legends have survived among the Jews for a much longer time than among the other nations and races of the world. When the world became too busy, or too practical, for this childhood occupation, the Jews continued to weave the mystic thread of fables and legends around the lives of their popular heroes. But seldom before in Jewish history has legend discovered a more favorite and fascinating subject than Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. The genius which created the unsurpassing wealth of stories and parables which are found in the Bible and Talmud was busy spinning its mystic web around the person and character of Rabbi Israel. About no other figure in history, not even that of Moses, has Jewish imagination woven a more fantastic texture of fables than about the unique and richly colored life of the founder of the Hassidic faith.[1]

Do we, or shall we, ever know what Rabbi Israel really was? How imagination has labored to trace his features, and poetry and romance to present him in many characters and rôles! There survive few exact details about him, but many legends that were collected in a book were accepted by his admirers as an outstanding and exemplary work.[2] So far as history is concerned it is quite as interesting and important as a reliable record, because it tells of the character of Israel's mission as well as of the state of mind of the people who were unceasingly enthusiastic about him.

All the conventional stories which crown the birth of most great men have been circulated about the advent of Israel Baal Shem Tob. One may, therefore, read that his soul was purer than the souls of most men, for it had no part in the sin of Adam which made him fall from the state of grace. When Adam was about to be created, a Hassidic legend tells, a number of souls, knowing that he would soon sin by eating from the fruit of the Tree of

Knowledge, fled to a far place outside the boundaries of Heaven, and waited there until after the sin was committed, and thereby escaped the evil of the Garden of Eden. This is how the soul of Rabbi Israel came to be born on earth in a state of innocence.[3]

Conflicting stories of his birth are told by Israel's enthusiastic admirers, one stranger than the other, one more incredible than the other, but they all illustrate the profound, almost divine, adoration which his admirers entertained for him. According to one legend, Eliezer, Israel's father, was driven from his village during war and led into servitude in a strange and foreign land, where he was compelled to carry heavy burdens and perform all sorts of menial work, until one day he was sold to a prince and Grand Vizier of a king, whose personal servant he became. Eliezer, quite naturally, was more intelligent than anyone else, and performed for his master important services for which he was rewarded with the king's own daughter, a beautiful and virtuous princess, for a wife. But Eliezer, remembering that he was already married, instead of being happy, looked sad and troubled and never approached the beautiful princess after the manner of a husband. When his new wife pressed him for the reason of his sorrow, he revealed to her the secret of all that had befallen him and how he longed to return to the wife of his youth. The princess loved and admired him all the more for his faithfulness, and not only bore him no grudge, but even loaded him with gold and silver and sent him on his way. After countless vicissitudes, and at one hundred years of age, he returned to his own country, just in time to beget a son, whom a heavenly messenger told him to call "Israel," because he was destined to enlighten the eyes of all Israel, in fulfillment of the words of the Scriptures, "Thou are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."[4]

According to another story, Israel was born to his father, Eliezer, and his mother, Sarah,[5] as a reward for

the former's hospitality and kindness to strangers. Although a very poor man himself, Eliezer was unsparing in his generosity to the poor. He would never allow a stranger to pass through his village uncared for. In order to test his piety, the Prophet Elijah disguised himself as a poor man, and, with his staff and traveling bag, knocked on his door one Sabbath day, when journeying, according to the Torah, is forbidden. But Eliezer, instead of rebuking the stranger for violating the Sabbath, invited him to his humble home and shared with him his scanty meal. On the morrow, when the stranger was about to depart, Eliezer accompanied him to the gate of the village and pressed a coin into his hand. The Prophet Elijah, the story goes, was so impressed with the piety and benevolence of his host, that, seeing he was childless, and already one hundred years old, blessed him with the birth of a son, whose name was to be "Israel," because of the light he was destined to bring to his people Israel.*

III

So far the legendary account of the advent of Israel Baal Shem Tob, but the real and unvarnished facts of his birth are, that he was born to very poor and humble parents in the village of Ukop, situated in a remote and obscure corner of Poland, known as Podolia, about the year 1700. Losing both parents in early childhood, the good people of Ukop undertook to care for the young orphan, and provided him with the sort of education which fell to the lot of all the Jewish children of the time.

But prosaic though his birth was, far from prosaic was Israel's early life, for, already in his earliest childhood, he seemed to have had a glimmer of his future task and mission in the world. Gifted with the healthy child's instinct for the open air, he hated the dark, damp and depressing atmosphere of the Heder, and would often

glide through its doors and escape to the woods, where he remained all day long, walking under the trees, lingering among the flowers, or sitting by the running brook, joyously absorbed in thought. When his absence was discovered, his tutors would search for him and bring him back, but as often as Israel could escape the keen and watchful eyes of the schoolmaster, he would run away again to the wooded retreats that skirted his native town and remain there for many long hours. When his superiors realized that scolding did not improve matters, they lost patience with him and let the boy do as he pleased.

The Heder is one of those institutions which have not improved with age. Far from being an educational paradise for children even to-day, one can only imagine what it must have been in the days of young Israel. Fortunately, we are spared the effort of guessing, for the Jewish philosopher, Solomon Maimon, almost a contemporary of Rabbi Israel, left us in his "Autobiography" an exact and vivid picture of the Heder. "The school," he writes, "is a small and smoky hut, and the children are scattered, some on benches, some on the bare earth. The master, in a dirty blouse, sitting on a table, holds between his knees a bowl, in which he grinds tobacco into snuff with a huge pestle-like club of Hercules, while, at the same time, he wields his authority. The ushers give lessons each in his corner, and rule those under their care quite as despotically as the master himself. Of the breakfast, lunch and the other food things sent to the school for the children, these gentlemen help themselves. Sometimes the poor youngsters get nothing at all, and yet they dare not make any complaint on the subject if they would not expose themselves to the vengeance of these tyrants. Here the children are imprisoned from morning to night, without an hour for themselves, except on Friday and half-holidays at the New Moon. As the children are doomed

in the bloom of youth to such an infernal school, it may be easily imagined with what rapture they looked forward to their release." [7]

IV

But, while the authority of school discipline was in a nature relaxed, Israel was not altogether neglected by the Jews of his native town, for suitable employment was soon found for him; and, at the age of thirteen, when most Jewish children are just beginning to make their first acquaintance with the higher branches of learning, he was apprenticed as an assistant to a schoolmaster, whose duty it was, not so much to teach as to conduct the little ones under his care to the Heder and to the synagogue. Every morning the youthful school assistant went from house to house to gather his little flock, in the evening bringing them back again. His job, though an ordinary one, was discharged in an extraordinary manner. He taught his young charges to sing the synagogue hymns and melodies with such fervor and enthusiasm that he not only kindled the spirit of devotion in the hearts of the children and captivated the souls of the older folk, but the singing voices broke through the clouds and rose upward to heaven. Satan, becoming jealous of Israel's powers, tried to divert him from his task, and, disguising himself as a werewolf, scattered fear and confusion in the flock of the little children. Mothers became frightened and refused to send their little ones to school; yet, Israel, remembering the words of his father, who, with his last breath, bade him to fear only God and none else, routed the enemy with a club and saved his little company of singing children from evil.[8]

Having demonstrated his piety and trustworthiness, Israel was appointed *Shamash,* or "beadle," of the little synagogue in his village community. By this time his reputation and standing in the community must have con-

siderably improved. Since time immemorial the position of Shamash carried with it no small degree of importance. As Shamash he was in charge not only of the physical condition of the synagogue but its religious conduct as well. He became an important official, with no few duties and responsibilities charged to his care. An excellent opportunity was now given him to improve his neglected education, for learned discussions were going on within the walls of the synagogue which, were he to pay attention, could not help develop and sharpen his mind. Since the day for the revelation of his power had not yet come, he did not show his passion for the Torah to the men of the synagogue, gaining for himself instead a reputation for laziness by dozing about the building all day long. In the stillness of the night, though, when the synagogue was vacant, while the students slept, Israel, unobserved, took down the holy books and pored all night over their sacred words. Yet, it was not the Talmud and its commentaries that he studied, but the Kabbalah which he found more congenial to his roving and fantastic mind. Legend embellishes these night vigils of Israel with many a picturesque story. It tells of heavenly messengers who came to keep him company during these long and dark hours, illuminating the drabness of the synagogue with their bright, mystic light, confiding to him secrets not entrusted to ordinary men.

Although Israel did not reveal himself, his secret became known to kindred spirits in far and distant lands. One such man was Rabbi Adam, who had in his possession a book of mysteries which, on his death, was to be entrusted by him to the man who had the purest soul and was well versed in the secret lore. When Rabbi Adam found himself well advanced in years, he told his son to go to the town of Ukop and deliver the book to a certain Israel whom he would find there, and with this, he died.

The son journeyed to Ukop and made his home in the

synagogue. He met there many holy and learned men, but not the one who could prove worthy of his father's book of mysteries. He also saw Israel, the beadle of the synagogue, but, surely, he could not be the man whom his father had in mind! Wearied by his futile search, he lay awake many a night, and what he saw filled him with fear and wonder; for, bending over his mysterious manuscripts, stood the much-scorned Shamash with a heavenly light playing about his head. At first he feared to approach him, but, remembering his father's words, he came to him with trembling steps; then, placing the manuscript into his hands, implored him to study it with him. The legend concludes with the story that, attempting to use the Book of Mysteries before he was fully master of its contents, proved fatal to the son of Rabbi Adam, who was devoured by flames before Israel could reach out his hand to help him.[9]

Scholars failed to discover the identity of "Rabbi Adam";[10] indeed, it is unlikely that any such man ever lived, as the name is not common among the Jews. But, while this story is no doubt apocryphal, it is not without its element of truth. At the time of Rabbi Israel, the Kabbalah was forbidden lore to which thousands of fanatics applied themselves in secret. The countrysides of Poland and Galicia were literally swarming with so-called holy men, who circulated both genuine and spurious Kabbalistic manuscripts, by whose use they pretended to be able to cure diseases, cast out demons, foretell the future, and perform other marvels for superstitious folk. It is not impossible that it was in some such way that Israel made his acquaintance with the Kabbalah. Besides being a house of prayer, the synagogue has since time immemorial served as a sort of hostlery for all sorts of impecunious travelers, and the beadle was the first to welcome them. He often gained their confidence. If they carried books or manuscripts with them, he was not infrequently allowed to examine their contents before they

were generally circulated. "Rabbi Adam" may, therefore, be a generic name for the wandering Kabbalists who went about secretly spreading the Kabbalistic contraband in Jewish towns and villages. Since Israel did not dare betray his devotion to the Kabbalah, he naturally studied its manuscripts during the night when he felt safe from the curious eyes of his superiors.

V

Although marriages, according to the wise men of the Talmud, are arranged in Heaven, there were good men and women in almost every Jewish community of old who considered it their pious duty to assist the hands of Providence. While the rabbis prescribe the age of eighteen as the becoming marital time for men, and a somewhat younger age for women, the good Jews of Russia and Poland would take no chance with their sons and daughters and rushed them off to the marriage altar long before they reached the age of puberty. In many cases these early marriages ended in tragedy, and filled the rabbinical courts of the time with piteous petitions for divorces.

Judging by the standards of the times, Israel had long since passed the marital age. Upon assuming charge of his position as beadle of the synagogue, with the brighter future it promised him, the matter could no longer be delayed, and so Israel suddenly found himself the husband of a wife, very likely against his own will.

Complete obscurity shrouds this episode of his life. We are left in the dark as to the character, nature and disposition of the woman who was first to share his name and lot. What were Israel's feelings toward his wife and the relationship which he unwillingly assumed? Were they those of love and tenderness, or were his thoughts those of anger and resentment because he was burdened with material cares and responsibilities when the spiritual possibilities were just beginning to ripen? But what-

ever his wedded life may have been, it did not last very long, for the marriage was soon dissolved by death, and Israel once more felt himself free to go his own way and choose his own life.

VI

There was nothing to keep him in Ukop any longer. He was a full-grown man, yet life held out little promise for the future. His mind had matured; vague intimations of his work had come to him, but everything was chaos and confusion. He was living in a community of good and godly men, but he felt that it was not in their company that his life-purpose would be realized. The limitations of the city of his birth, with its provincial atmosphere and the stifling influence of its synagogue and schools became revealed to him. He wanted to be free, as free as he saw the birds, flowers and trees in his childhood haunts. He dreamt of the new life in which he should be bound by no authority except the commanding Voice which already made itself felt in his heart. But the difficulties were staggering. He lived among people to whom outward success counted for much. Although he tried his hand at several things, he achieved outstanding success in nothing. At the parting of the ways he found himself alone with no visible means of support.

He bethought himself of his first occupation; because of his love for little ones, he became a teacher of children. His reputation soon spread for there was a kindliness about him which won him the hearts of the little tots. He was not at all like the other schoolmasters who ruled their youthful flocks with an iron rod. He was to them a companion rather than a teacher, and the children repaid his tenderness with their love and devotion. He more than taught his pupils: he made the words of the Torah live for them. The parents began to feel that, somehow, their children were changed, that they were not like the other children in the village. The little he

knew he breathed into their very souls as it were, and they became transformed as though touched by a mysterious hand.

The parents who brought their children to him loved to spend many hours in his company, for he became known as a kind and gentle teacher and a pleasant companion, silent when he had nothing to say, pertinent and sincere when he did speak, always throwing light on every subject. They loved to hear him talk, for he spoke with the natural unaffectedness used in speaking to children. His probity, too, got to be rumored about, and his fellow townsmen came to him with their quarrels and disputes.[11] So just and honest were his decisions that even the losing party bore him no grudge but went away happy and content. Thus the fame of Israel traveled from village to village, till it reached large and important communities; many came to see the wise and holy man from far and distant places.

One day it happened that Ephraim,[12] the father of Rabbi Abraham Gershon of Brody, had a business dispute with a man, and they went to Israel for arbitration. His piety, honesty, and the manner in which he conducted himself made such a powerful impression on Ephraim that they became friends. On learning that Israel was without a wife, he proposed that he marry his daughter, Hannah. Israel knew that she was his destined companion and immediately accepted the offer. Considering his own poor and humble circumstances and the lady's celebrated brother, it was a flattering match which did him no little honor. Israel stipulated that the bethrothal be kept secret and all reference to his learning and piety be omitted from the contract.

Ephraim died shortly after the document was signed and sealed, and Israel returned to his children in the school. When the day set for his wedding arrived, Israel appeared at the door of the great Rabbi of Brody clad in coarse garments and broken boots, after the manner

of a poor peasant. Rabbi Abraham, thinking that he was a beggar, offered him a coin, but Israel drew him aside and told him that he had a secret to reveal to him. When they were alone, he took from his pocket the betrothal pact and demanded its fulfillment. The rabbi was shocked at the dishonor which the coarse peasant was bringing upon the family, and, examining his father's signature and finding it to be genuine, he tried to prevail upon his sister to renounce her father's choice. But Hannah, a pious and dutiful daughter, looking into the soul of her suitor rather than his uncouth appearance, declined to act contrary to the wishes of her parent and accepted Israel as her husband.

Rabbi Abraham Gershon tried to improve his brother-in-law's neglected education by instructing him in the rudiments of the Torah, but failed; he got other teachers to educate him, but that, too, proved futile. He made him his coachman, but this also proved beyond his wits; for, as Israel was driving one day for his master, he let the traces slip from his hand and the vehicle was ditched, almost killing the riders. The rabbi, thoroughly angered by this time, and convinced of Israel's unfitness for anything, demanded that his sister leave Brody with her husband so as not to be embarrassed by his brother-in-law's graceless presence.

VII

The couple settled in a village near Kutty not far from Brody, on the very fringe of the Carpathian Mountains. They lived in poverty, earning their scanty bread by selling in the city the sand and lime which they dug up in the mountain ravines. But they were supremely happy, for Israel was overwhelmed with the natural scenery of the place. The clear and balmy air, the virgin forests, and the hills towering high unto the very skies made his heart tremble with a sacred, joyous feeling. He was thrilled as in the days of his childhood, when he spent many hours

amid the hills and forests that surrounded the town of his birth. This was something he had always hoped and longed for. He built for himself a hut where he spent many days in solitude, dreaming, praying and singing strange and fantastic songs which awakened echoes in the mountains as though they answered his supplications. When he was hungry, he mixed some flour with water and let the sun bake it into bread; when the nights were cold and dark, the trees would burst forth in flames at the mere touch of his finger.[13] All week long he would stay there, returning to his wife only for the Sabbath; and Hannah, although alone and poor, was, nevertheless, happy, for she believed in him and was certain that her reward would one day come. Like the wife of Rabbi Akiba, she gladly suffered all kinds of hardships and privations in the belief that her husband's story would one day be told. It was also to his wife that Israel first revealed himself. She listened to his entrancing words, with wonder at first, and afterwards believed in him. One can fancy the boundless gratitude of Israel, and how of all the kindnesses she had shown him, this confidence in him was the greatest. All his life his devotion to her was touching, and when she died, he refused to remarry, saying that heaven had departed with her.

It was in the solitude of the Carpathian Mountains that Hassidism was born, where the mystic thread soon to encircle the earth, was woven. In the crowded loneliness of their majestic hills the faith which was shortly to set thousands of hearts aflame, was founded. Every great religious leader came forth with a message after long periods of meditation in lonely places. In the wastes of Midian the musing shepherd, Moses, tending the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, produced a new religion. Buddha renounced the teeming life of India to spend his days amid the sounding loneliness of the Ganges, and a faith which kindled millions of men emerged. From the bosom of the Arabian wilderness

came Mohammed, and thousands followed his word and sword.

So also Israel. He withdrew himself from the world that he might give the most to it; he retired from the busy marts of life so that he might hear the still, soft voice which, he felt, was speaking within him. The spurs of the Carpathian hills whispered secrets to him. Here he learned what he would not have acquired in the dark, dirty hovels called schools in Poland. He acquired the greatest wisdom which is given to man to know—the wisdom of God and Man. He learned the language of the beasts and birds, of the plants and trees; and from the peasant women, he learned the healing properties of the grasses and herbs. He learned to cure the sick, to drive out evil spirits, and to write amulets. All sorts of men became his associates, and they found his company pleasant, kindly and congenial. Women and pleasant folk would seek him out in his mountain retreat and confide all their secrets and intimacies to him. They regarded him as a great and holy man and consulted him on all matters touching their personal daily life. Evil men forsook their sinful ways by the mere tenderness of his words and returned to God.

It happened that in the mountains where Israel lived there were robbers who plotted to kill him. One day they saw him walking on a ledge of a mountain peak. A chasm lay between the cliffs he trod and the next mountain. He seemed absorbed in thought and did not notice where he was walking. "He will surely walk off the cliff," thought they, "and we will be spared the trouble of slaying him." But when they saw the mountains move together and close the chasm between them, they realized that he was a holy man and came to him for his blessing and forgiveness. Rabbi Israel promised to forgive them, but not until they had assured him that they would forsake their evil ways and harm no man.[14]

VIII

Seven years of training and preparation had passed over Israel in this way. He became learned in many things but not in the wisdom of books. Life in the mountains with all its experiences was all he knew. What of the world he, with his own eyes and thoughts, could take in, so much and no more he learned. Reports of his piety and wisdom began to circulate. Although dressed in poor and coarse garments, there was a light of unearthly purity and saintliness which seemed to emanate from him. He was noted to perform religious exercises with greater rapture and devotion than other men, and his prayers were recited with almost superhuman ecstasy. Traveling scholars passed the night in his hut; they tried to engage him in learned conversations, but Israel feigned ignorance of their meaning. One such man, upon waking during the night, saw Israel studying the Torah, and, while there was no lamp, an illumination like a bright flame filled the room. He understood that Israel was a holy man, and crept back to his bed and said nothing. When he came to Brody he told Rabbi Abraham Gershon what he saw, but he would not believe him, for he knew that his brother-in-law was ignorant.

At length, Abraham Gershon repented of his harshness to his sister and her graceless husband and set them up in a tavern, but Israel left its management to his wife, and himself wandered off to the near-by woods and meadows and spent there many days in solitude, returning to his home for the holy Sabbath. But here his true identity could no longer be kept secret, for the travelers, observing his strange and holy ways, spread his fame till, in a very short time, there was not a village or log-house but was buzzing with his wondrous and miraculous deeds. Israel was by now a grown man, nearing forty years, and the voice of God came to him and said, "The time has come for thee to reveal thyself."

IX

Israel left the tavern and took to traveling. His itinerary covered many places. He went about performing miracles by the use of the Holy Name, dispensing cures, summoning spirits, exorcising evil spirits, and foretelling the future. In the days of superstitious Poland, when scientific medicine was not yet common, the Jews were accustomed to call upon their holy medicine men for the healing of all sorts of physical and mental ailments. Many of these "doctors" rose to fame. In one respect only, this Israel was quite unlike other "healers," for there was a kindliness and saintliness about him which won the confidence of the downcast Jews. There was a godly light in his eyes and godly sincerity in his heart. The people saw that he came and spent himself not for money but because he truly loved them. Even Christian peasants came to him with their wounds and woes. This explains why they called him *Baal Shem Tob,* "The *Kind* Master of the Name."

The early biographers of Rabbi Israel are most flattering in the miraculous powers they attribute to him. He is almost always accompanied by followers who were smitten with all kinds of mental and physical ailments. They beg, they plead, they fall about him to relieve them of their misfortunes. Piteous letters arrive from many places urging him to come and perform his miraculous cures. Incredible as such stories are, yet it was the peculiarity of the Jews that any great leader to be accepted had to accredit himself by working miracles. Thus the great men of old had done, and thus, too, could Jesus ever meet the popular ideas of a Messiah, or fit himself into the specifications of prophecy which were set up by his generation. When there were no hospitals or asylums, and the sick were all about, it was assumed that a religious teacher must also assume the functions of a healer. Much as Rabbi Israel may have deprecated this part of

his calling, and often rebuked the spirit that demanded it, he could not escape the superstition of his day and had either to accept the reputation of theurgic power, or else abandon his mission.

Israel took little pleasure in this occupation, and he resorted to it against his own will only when the material needs of his family were pressing. For already higher dreams and aspirations began to take shape in his mind. What he wanted was to heal not the physical ailments of his people, but their spiritual condition. He traveled through the towns and villages of Volhynnia, Wallachia and Podolia. What he saw and heard greatly surprised and shocked him. He found the hearts of the people clogged by superstitions; found them steeped in ignorance and lost in spiritual darkness, degraded to the low position of the Christian peasants among whom they lived. He met good and earnest men among them, but they were allowed to grow up in ignorance of what Judaism really was. He entered their synagogues only to find scholars so absorbed in the study of the holy books that they forgot the needs and anguish of the unlearned folk.

His desire was to help and assist them, comfort them in their sorrow and soothe them in the spiritual despondency which was creeping fast over them. And so, from being a miracle worker, Rabbi Israel became a teacher; nay, more than a teacher, he became a friend and companion of the people. He mingled with the masses, spoke to them in a language they could understand. He talked to them of the things they knew and understood, and spiced his conversations with similes and illustrations which were drawn from their daily experience. He talked to them of God and the holy Torah. What he told them was neither new nor striking, just familiar narratives from the Bible, the Talmud, or the Zohar. His speech was plain and unaffected, without the intellectual varnish of the scholars. The simple folk, the teamsters, the tailors,

the cobblers, the tavern-keepers, heard and understood him and went away better and purer men.

Soon disciples began to gather about him. Reports of his wondrous teachings were spread to every town and community in Poland. After the plain and simple people came scholars, who put aside their books and went to listen to his wisdom. A new meaning seemed to come into their life; they learned to look at the world from a different point of view. Poor and humble men began to feel a consciousness of pride and dignity coming over them. They felt themselves no longer neglected and uncared for, but knew that in God's world there was a niche also for such as they.

Israel became a favorite of the masses; simple and warm-hearted like themselves, he knew how to win their love and confidence. In dress, speech and manner he was as one of the people. It was not a pretended modesty that he was affecting, but a simplicity that was real and genuine. Soon legends began to circulate about him. He was said to have cured the blind, revived the dead, predicted events, given children to the barren, raised a bride from an untimely grave, covered great distances in a single night, and passed over lakes and rivers by the spreading of his mantle over them. Fathers reported these miracles to their sons, and mothers to their daughters, till, in a short time, there grew up a widespread enthusiasm about him among all sorts and classes of people.

X

How far did Israel himself believe in the miraculous powers which his admirers attributed to him? While the question will perhaps never be satisfactorily answered, it is not impossible that he was no little flattered by the opinion held of him by his contemporaries, and only too willingly accepted their blind faith in him. In a highly emotional life such as his, the division between the pos-

sible and the impossible readily disappears. The most extravagant claims were made for him by his followers. His soul was said to be of the souls of Enoch, David, Solomon and Saadyah Gaon, and that he had for his teachers the Prophet Elijah, and Ahiyah of Shiloh,[15] one of the seven long-lived saints whose life extended over the whole history of mankind. There was no secret on earth or in heaven which was unknown to him, and, by merely looking at a man he could read his past and foretell his future. The stories of his modesty and humility are followed by accounts which prove that Israel was far from unconscious of his own powers and importance. The revelations and visions which he reported of himself surpass in daring anything that his admirers had claimed for him. Thus, writing to his pupil, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, he gives the exact time when the prophets Elijah and Ahiyah had revealed themselves to him.

In a prophetic manifesto which he sent to his brother-in-law, Abraham Gershon, then living in Palestine, Israel asserted that on the first day of Rosh Hashannah he had a "lifting of soul," and saw in heaven the Messiah and many of the souls of the dead. In reply to his petition, "Let me know, Master, when thou wilt appear on earth," the Messiah answered, "This shall be a sign unto thee: when thy doctrine shall become known, and the fountains of thy wisdom shall be poured forth, when all other men shall have the power of performing the same mysteries as thyself, then shall all the hosts of impurity disappear, and the time of great favor and salvation shall arrive." [16]

XI

Tluste became the center of his activities, but he did not confine himself exclusively to this town but made many extensive journeys. The truly great men of history lived dynamic and not static lives. While many of the great rabbis sat at the doors of their academies and

waited for the disciples to come to them, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob literally covered every inch of ground which later fell to his kingdom. In the days when traveling facilities were few, and distant journeys were beset with many dangers, it is really surprising to find what vast stretches he covered and the number of towns and villages he visited.

But Tluste soon became too small a place to hold the large numbers of pupils who crowded to sit at his feet and listened to his words. Hence, about the year 1740, Israel took up his residence in Medziboz, a small town in Podolia, which, to the very day of his death, remained the capital of the Hassidic sect. The change was important, for henceforth Medziboz became the symbol of the movement which was destined to dominate the hearts and lives of thousands of men. What Safed was to the Kabbalistic movement in the sixteenth century, Medziboz was to Hassidism two hundred years later, a sort of holy shrine to which came pilgrims from all parts of Podolia and its adjacent territories.

What was responsible for Israel's change of residence? Outwardly, there was nothing to be gained by this shifting of centers. For ten years Tluste had become identified with the activities of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. It was the city where his first triumphs were scored and his fame and following made. But Tluste remembered him as a conjuror and miracle-worker, a reputation he was anxious to shed. Tluste was the scene of his discipline and preparation, but was not destined to behold the consummation of his dream. Rabbi Israel conceived the ambition of establishing himself as a religious teacher, not by the authority of signs but by the authority of the divine word which he felt was burning within him. The change of method and policy demanded also a change of locations.

And Medziboz offered an excellent opportunity for

what Rabbi Israel had in mind. It was an older and larger community than Tluste, and it prided itself on a synagogue which was said to be three hundred years old. In learned Jewish circles it was famous for the scholarly rabbis who lived there. In addition to these advantages, Medziboz was easily accessible to many Jewish communities round about. It had roads which reached out in many directions, and it was on the itinerary of traveling Jewish scholars. The city afforded Israel an excellent background for the religious propaganda which he had in mind. It provided him with a pulpit from which he could address himself, not only to the Jews of his own town but to the much larger audience on which he had set his heart. It lay on the frontiers of several important countries. Poland was within sight; Ukrainia was not far away, and Lithuania could be reached without much difficulty. It was, therefore, a clever strategic stroke which made Israel choose Medziboz for the cradle of the faith which he had originated.

XII

He was no sooner settled in Medziboz than visitors flocked to him from almost all parts of the country. Some came to be instructed and inspired, while others were driven by curiosity to see the man who, although of humble birth and little learning, was being proclaimed as a saint and a holy man. Grave and earnest men came to test his faith and examine his doctrine, for Israel was accused of heresy as well as ignorance of the Torah, and was charged with leading astray people still more ignorant than himself. No reports of these meetings were left, but we are assured that the rabbis went away convinced that it was not the intention of Israel to destroy faith but revive it, not to violate tradition but confirm it, not to scoff at Talmudic learning but pursue it with greater earnestness and enthusiasm.[17]

Unlike the learned rabbis, Rabbi Israel was easily accessible to all who sought his presence. He saw a glimmer of nobility and goodness in the most ordinary man. He drew no distinction between the rich and poor, for all men were equal in his eyes and in the sight of God whom he loved and served. On the Sabbath he gathered them together in the synagogue and expounded the words of the Torah to them. He spoke in simple parables and they could understand his words easily. They felt encouraged and uplifted; the delights of Heaven were not only for the scholars, but also for humble folk such as they. He instructed them in the ways of God and goodness. He taught them that God was in everything and everybody, even in the heart of the sinner. God, he told them, is not to be feared but loved, not to be approached with tears and terror, but with a joyous and singing heart. Everywhere, he declared, they could pray to God, on the muddy road, in the inwardness of their hearts, as in the synagogue; for it is not the place, but the will and intention which make prayer acceptable to Heaven. He taught them to love one another and to justly deal with their neighbors. He said it was not by the things they did and not by what they professed, that their faith is tested. This is how the plain and simple-hearted Jews came to love and follow their kind and gentle teacher and weave stories and legends about him.

XIII

But there were also deep sorrows which smote the heart of Rabbi Israel. For many years he seemed to hear the Spirit of the Holy Land calling to him, as though pleading to place his hand upon it and quicken it into life. It was a dream which troubled him by day and gave him no rest by night. What other man was more deserving of the Land of Israel than he whose very name suggested their association? The mystic dream that was conceived in Palestine he was weaving into reality. By uniting his

soul with the souls of the masters of his faith he might even be able to call down the Messiah and redeem the Holy Land.

Israel hired a ship, and, with his daughter, started out on his holy mission. But the sea was angry and furious, and the billows pierced the very clouds. Pirates fell upon the passengers and Israel lay helpless on the deck of the rocking boat. They got as far as Stamboul and he waited for a sign to continue his journey. But the sign did not come; instead, he seemed to hear voices which told him to return homeward the way he came. Israel never got over his disappointment; he took his sorrow to the grave.[18]

Another sorrow which sorely afflicted his soul was when the light of the holy Torah was threatened with extinction. It was at the time when the Frankist controversy rent the House of Israel in twain. What boundless suffering Israel then endured! He went about without food and sleep for many days and nights, the while dispatching prayers to Heaven, but they came back unanswered. Each day his suffering and horror increased, till, with his own eyes, he was fated to behold great pyramids of the holy books of the Talmud cast upon the pyre. The crackling flames burned wounds in his heart which never healed. To the very end, he remembered the agony of the terrible spectacle.

Rabbi Israel looked deeper into the consequences of the Frankist catastrophe than the Polish rabbis; for, while the latter rejoiced when Jacob Frank and many of his followers went over to the Catholic faith, since it rid the Jewish people of dangerous heretics, he wailed and mourned over the loss of a great tragedy. "I heard the Lord say," he declared, "as long as the diseased limb is joined in the body, there is hope that it may be cured in time; but when it has been cut off, it is lost forever, for every Israelite is a limb of the Shekhinah." [19]

With his deep and understanding tolerance, Israel

would not judge harshly even the arch-heretic Sabbatai Zebi, thus displaying a much keener appreciation of the man than most Jewish historians. While condemning his wild and riotous life, to which he attributed his decline and fall, he did not, at the same time, fail to recognize his dominating will and genius. "There was a spark of holiness in Sabbatai Zebi," Rabbi Israel said, "but it was his false pride and vanity which brought him low." [20]

Chapter IV

THE PROPHET AND HIS MESSAGE

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob was not a philosopher; the truth that filled his heart did not come to him from books or learning. He knew nothing of the speculations of the Jewish philosophers of the Spanish school whose very names he probably never heard.[1] The sublime suggestions of his teachings did not come to him by following any known method of thinking, but as an illumination of his whole being, almost like a communion from on high. A man of feeling and emotion, he would have despised, even if he knew, any other rule than that of the heart. He was an original thinker, if any such uprush of religious ecstasy as dominated his life can be called by such name. A sunny faith in God inspired all his words and teachings; it was part of the legacy which he received from the religion of his childhood and his intimate association with nature. God was the absorbing theme of all his thoughts, and to this theme he devoted all the years of his great life.

Judaism is held to be alien to mysticism and the Jews too practical a people for the mystical temperament.[2] Yet, in Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob we have a man who was almost burning himself up with the mystic yearning for God, one who saw and felt His nearness as did few other men. His deepest thoughts and profoundest emotions were dominated by the reality and presence of God. There is nothing that stands outside of God, all things being the forms through which He reveals himself.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob was a pantheist without ever having heard of Spinoza. It came to him simply and

naturally from his profound love and knowledge of nature.[3] God did not create the world and then withdraw Himself from it, but creation is continuous, progressive, unending. This may sound Bergsonian, but he preceded Bergson by almost two hundred years.

II

The basic principle of Rabbi Israel's teachings is not that God *is,* but that whatever *is,* is in God. There is nothing that is void of God; the Holy One sent his Divine Glory, called the *Shekhinah,* upon the earth, and its sparks are in all things. God is to be found in the grand manifestations of nature—in the rolling thunder, in the flash of lightning, in the snow-clad mountains, in the mighty trees of the forests, as well as in the humblest flower or blade of grass. He is in the simple and unaffected heart of the ignorant peasant as in the wisdom and learning of the scholar. In one of his fine utterances, he says: "It is necessary for man always to bear in mind that God is with him always and everywhere; that He is, so to speak, the finest of matter, which is poured everywhere; that He is the master of all that happens in the Universe. . . . Let man realize that when he looks at things material, he beholds in reality the Divine Countenance, which is present everywhere. Keeping this in mind, man will find it possible to serve the Lord in all things, even in trifles." [4]

Rabbi Israel did not deny the reality of matter, but he taught that matter is nothing but a limb of the Shekhinah. It would seem at times as though God was secreting himself behind barriers and partitions, but the truly wise and pious man knows that these things are but appearances and illusions. He illustrated this thought by the parable of the king who had built a glorious palace full of corridors and partitions, but himself lived in the innermost room. When the palace was completed and his servants came to pay him homage, they found that they could not

approach the king because of the devious mazes. While they stood and wondered, the king's son came and told them that those were not real partitions, but only magical illusions, and that the king, in truth, was easily accessible. "Push forward bravely," he said, "and you shall find no obstacle." [5]

From this flows as a natural consequence his exuberant faith and optimism. Whereas the God of Rabbi Luria was a solemn and melancholy Deity, demanding tears and commanding penance and the mortification of the flesh, there is almost a touch of healthy and joyous paganism about the God of Rabbi Israel. He broke through the fences of the Practical Kabbalah by insisting that man should approach his Creator not in tears and weeping, but with a happy and singing heart. Gloom, he taught, is the devil's safest method of tempting man to sin.[6] "No child," said Rabbi Israel, "is born except through pleasure and joy. By the same token, if one wishes his prayers to bear fruit, he must offer them with pleasure and joy." [6a]

To the Jews of his time, this doctrine came with a sense of real relief; for, as a result of their experiences, Judaism became a melancholy and depressing religion. Jews gathered in the synagogues to meditate upon defeat and death, and weeping became their natural habit of prayer. Even the holiday hymns had a ring of tears in them. By driving out fear and gloom from the hearts of the Jews Israel made Judaism a joyous and healthy experience.

In contrast to the Kabbalists of his time he taught that life is not to be shunned but enjoyed, that the pleasures and appetites of the senses are not to be rejected but refined and purified, for man may serve God with his body as well as with his soul. To the truly pious man, he said, praying, eating, drinking and sleeping are all one; to bind all these things into living action and carry everlasting life into them is the true purpose of religion.[7] When he heard that one of his disciples was following ascetic practices, Rabbi Israel wrote to him: "I hear that

you think yourself compelled from religious motives to enter upon a course of penance and fasts. My soul is outraged by your determination. By the counsel of God I order you to abandon such dangerous practices, which are but the outcome of a disordered mind. It is written, 'Thou shalt not hide thyself from thine own flesh!' Fast, then, no more than is prescribed; follow my command and God will be with you." [8]

Since God is in everything, it follows that there is good, actual or potential, in all things. Sin and evil are, therefore, not positive conditions, but relative, which may be turned into goodness and virtue. Even the Evil One himself is part of Universal Glory, and should be met with joy, for the descent is necessary to the rise; the fall is a stepping-stone to purity.[9] When, as a boy, he held the bewitching black heart of the Enemy in his hand and had the power to destroy it, he would do no harm to it, because he realized that it, too, had suffered and was therefore purified.

Rabbi Israel had an unalterable faith in all men and under all conditions and circumstances. He who loves God, he said, loves all his creatures, and exemplified his doctrine by his own life and conduct. There was no criticism that was levelled against him with greater sharpness than that he was indiscriminate in his choice of friends. He mingled with all sorts of men. Among his associates were innkeepers, publicans, social outcasts, and men and women who enjoyed an unsavory reputation in the community. He refused to despair of any man, or consider sinners as irredeemable. Sin, he taught, is not to be despised but purified, not to be fled from, but subordinated. Love and tolerance will restore the most hardened sinner to the path of virtue and goodness. To a father who came to Israel to consult him as to what to do with his son who had strayed from God and the Torah, his reply was, "Love him all the more."

The story is told of a woman who was accused of adul-

tery, and whom to save the family from disgrace, her brothers determined to slay. They lured her to a lonely place, where they would have carried out their design, had it not been for the Holy Spirit which revealed the plot to Israel at the right moment. He instantly repaired to the place and succeeded in dissuading the men from their dark purpose and thus saved the sinner from death and her brothers from a crime that was worse than incest. This woman, says Dr. Solomon Schechter, afterwards became a sort of Magdalen in the Hassidic sect.[10]

III

All of Israel's teachings may be considered as merely introductory to his doctrine of Prayer. It is on this point that the founder of Hassidism was most original. Horodezky interpreted the Hassidic attitude to prayer correctly when he said, "Hassidism was the first to catch the romance and poetry of prayer." [11] With prophetic insight Rabbi Israel taught the spiritual inwardness of prayer. To be effective, prayer must be the result of inner, spiritual growth. It is by means of such prayer that man not only approaches God, but becomes godlike. What man is and ever hopes to be, he attains by praying; all that he had himself achieved, he testified, came to him not from books or learning, but through prayer.[12] Prayer is that sense of inner unity with God which is the basis and substance of all true religion. It makes man lose his sense of separation from God and establishes divine harmonies in his soul which are not otherwise attainable. Said he: "The first time a thing occurs in nature it is called a miracle; later it becomes natural, and no attention is paid to it. Let your worship and your service be a fresh miracle every day to you. Only such worship performed from the heart, with enthusiasm, is acceptable." [12a]

But, in order that prayer shall accomplish all this, it must not be mechanical and perfunctory, not mere lip-service, or an idle repetition of words, which is worse

than useless, but devout, enthusiastic, rapturous. It is only after such prayer that the great realization may come. In accordance with the law of nature, Rabbi Israel says, man should die after such a spiritual exercise, and it is an act of divine mercy that he survives it.[13] Such prayer asks for no gifts, no grants, no favors, no petitions, but merely to be admitted into His presence. He tells the parable of the king who invited his servants to come to see him. There were treasures of gold and silver heaped in the halls; most of the people were content to go no farther, thinking of the rich gifts they were to carry away with them. But there was one wise and loyal servant whose heart was set on no earthly prize, but only on the permission to see the king and to glory in his presence.[14]

There was nothing that provoked Rabbi Israel's anger more than mechanical and lifeless prayers, those that are without feeling or warmth, and, therefore, useless and ineffective. His strictures against such prayers were often severe. He called them dead and wooden prayers, unable to lift themselves to God. Worse than no prayer at all, he said, are those that are recited with a cold and unfeeling heart. When he passed through a house of worship and saw men huddled over their books, reading in a hasty mumble, reading faster and faster, hour after hour, he said, "I cannot pray here. Those prayers are dead prayers. They have no strength to fly to Heaven. They are crushed; they lie one on top of the other; the house is filled with them." [15]

His own prayers were deep and stirring, aglow with unsuppressed emotion. When his opponents laughed at his way of praying, and poked fun at the swaying of his body and grimaces, Rabbi Israel told his disciples the story of the "Deaf Man and the Mad Dancers." Once in a house there was a wedding feast. The musicians sat in a corner and played upon their instruments. The guests danced to their music and made merry; they swayed this way and that way, and the house was filled with noise and

joy. But a deaf man passed outside the house; he looked in through the window and saw the people whirling about the room, leaping and throwing about their arms. "See how they fling themselves about," he cried out, "it is a house filled with madmen," for he could not hear the music to which they were dancing.[16]

Since prayer is inward, its external forms do not matter. Time and place play no important part for one can pray in the open spaces of nature, amidst the wealth and fragrance of grass and flowers as in a house dedicated to worship. When Israel was reproached for praying long after the limited time for worship had passed, his answer was, "Can a child be told when he may approach his father?" In order that man might experience the fullest rapture of prayer, he must divest himself of all the external trappings of life and he emphasized this thought by means of an erotic example. "When a bride is led to the altar, she adorns and decorates herself, but when the time for the union is come, she divests herself of her clothing, in order that her body may approach nearer to that of her lover, as it is written, 'I shall behold God from out of my flesh.' " [17]

Although Rabbi Israel ascribed miraculous powers to the words and the very letters of the prayers, he had reference to their inner meaning rather than their external form, for the outwardness of prayer meant as nothing to him. Thus, he said, one may pray as fervently when he does not know the characters of the Hebrew alphabet, as one who had mastered all the written prayers by heart.

A poor village Jew was in the habit of worshipping during the Holy Days in Rabbi Israel's synagogue. He had a slow-witted boy who did not master the letters of the Aleph Beth, hence his father would not take him to the synagogue. But when the boy became thirteen he was allowed to accompany his father to the House of God on the Day of Atonement. The boy took a reed and made himself a flute. When the congregation chanted

the prayers, he asked his father to allow him to play upon it but he was forbidden to do so. When the Neilah service came, the atmosphere in the synagogue grew tense and warm and the hearts of the worshipers melted like the candles in their clay sockets, the boy could no longer contain himself, and, taking out the flute, he sang and played upon it. The whole congregation stood terrified by this desecration of the service, but Rabbi Israel was happy and called out, "The cloud is pierced and broken, and the power of the Evil One is shattered." [18]

IV

It is not always easy to make out the fine shadings which differentiate between *Kavanah, Debekuth,* and *Hithlahabuth,* the three attributes of piety, or service of God, which one meets often in the Hassidic writings. Although they merge into one another, they nevertheless spring from different spiritually emotional states of mind. *Kavanah* may be described as that intensity of feeling and complete absorption in any pious or religious act which makes one oblivious to his physical surroundings. It is the gift of concentration without which the performance of any religious ordinance becomes mechanical and useless. The highest state of Kavanah leads to complete abandonment of the Self and to a degree of ecstasy which is the highest form of religion. Rabbi Israel was capable of such Kavanah and became utterly forgetful of himself when he recited his prayers.

Although Kavanah in its highest form is a gift which comes by the grace of God rather than by personal effort, one may nevertheless stimulate its coming by certain exercises, and Rabbi Israel prescribed the ways and methods by which it may be attained. Thus, he said, Kavanah may be achieved by letting the meaning of the prayers flow into one's soul before pronouncing their words. The reading of appropriate psalms will help to establish the spiritual harmony needed for the attainment of Kava-

nah.[19] But under no circumstances can the gift of concentration be achieved, unless one approaches his Creator with a cheerful and joyous heart, for there is nothing that shuts the gates of Heaven as does the brooding and melancholy mind. Singing and chanting became, therefore, an important part of prayer, not those sad, plaintive and melancholy songs of the synagogue or the *Beth Hamidrash,* but the joyous and jubilant songs that the Psalmist must have had in mind when he said, "Thy statutes have become songs unto me." [20]

Kavanah is a quality not only of prayer but of almost everything else. The truly pious man may vitalize the most commonplace things till they receive the dignity and fervor of Kavanah. Of a truth, nothing without the warming and vitalizing touch of Concentration is worth doing. The study of the Torah is only of value when it is pursued with utter forgetfulness of Self, of the rewards it brings or the flattery and reputation it holds out. To the Zaddik more than to any other man, it is given so to clothe all his actions with Kavanah that even his most ordinary deeds become shining as the stars.

Debekuth is that cleaving unto God in which the sense of separation from Him is lost. It is the flowing of oneself into the Infinite in which the soul of man becomes part of the Universal Soul. By means of Debekuth man perfects his inner unity with God, which is the basis of true religion. Prayer is the promise of which Debekuth is the fulfillment; the former is the flower of which the latter is the ripened fruit. It is the kindling flame which sets the dead words aglow with life and meaning. Without its revivifying touch our prayers are cold and powerless, unable to lift themselves to God. By the help of Debekuth, prayer ceases to be routine and becomes a refreshing and ennobling exercise. God cannot be served without Debekuth.

Yet, while Debekuth, like Kavanah, is a gift which is not of human making, one may help to bring it on by

artificial means. It is the essence of Debekuth that it is dynamic and not static. It is mobile, agile, a flowing together of all the senses and faculties, like the whirling of a stream, or the passing wind which makes the leaves and branches tremble. The highest sort of prayer is the one that not only moves the soul but sets all the limbs of the body astir, as it is written, "All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee." [21] Swaying of the body and other such strong physical and mental agitations were, therefore, employed in Beshtian Hassidism as aids to bring on the state of Debekuth. Israel believed in this method of accelerating his state of rapture, and often worked so hard to bring it on that he felt a deathly weakness coming over him. As a result of his bodily agitations and intense devotion he claimed to have caught glimpses of the En-Sof, his soul soaring upward to the world of light, hearing secrets and revelations which were not divulged to ordinary human beings. By means of Debekuth he is said to have effected a union (Zivug) with the Shekhinah. Prayer became to Israel a way of attracting to himself the attention of God when he was in a state of spiritual despair. When he was one day reproached for his unseemly contortions and gesticulations, his reply was that when a man is drowning he cannot be blamed for trying to attract attention by every means possible.[22]

Hithlahabuth is the kindling and purifying fire which saves religion from stagnating into cold formality. It is the uninterrupted thought and communion with God which raises and ennobles life and causes the roots of sin to wither. Kavanah and Debekuth are its parents, but Hithlahabuth is their glorious consummation. Prayer without Hithlahabuth is like the wood upon the altar before it is touched by the fire from heaven. It is only when the spark has descended that the sacrifice is accepted. Hithlahabuth is the impregnation of the things of this earth with the Living Glory, the spiritualizing process which carries everlasting life into the mundane

affairs of man. By making all things flow into God and unite with the Universal Soul Hithlahabuth will hasten the end of the Galuth and the coming of the Messiah.[23]

Hithlahabuth melts away the dualism of the corporeal and incorporeal, of spirit and matter. Time and space vanish in its presence, and the very Evil One as though he never were. Life and Death become as nothing; good and evil as though they did not exist. Ecstasy spans a bridge over heaven and earth; body and soul lose their significance, for man becomes one with the Living Soul. The senses die, the passions cool, the vices disappear—Hithlahabuth spreads out a kingdom in which all these things fade away into the En-Sof.

V

While Israel preached the dignity and nobility of man, he emphasized at the same time the value of *Shifluth,*[24] or "Humility," as an important rung in the mystic ladder which leads to God. The two are not contradictory, for it is only the strong, the free, the man who is conscious of his own powers who can be truly humble. The slave cannot be said to possess humility, for humility is to him the resignation to a fate from which there is no escape. But in Hassidism humility is not an outward manifestation, a bending of the back or servile demeanor, but an inward experience, flowing from the totality of the Hassidic conception of man's place in the world.[25] True humility is realized by the negation of Self, when a man says to himself, "Verily, I am as nothing, and whatever pride I may possess is only in relation to God, but as for myself, I am no more than the worm." [26] Modesty is the fruit of the reflection that man is only part of the life-force which flows through all creation.

There is nothing that Rabbi Israel castigated so severely as pride, which he described as idolatry in disguise. Vanity, he said, has the effect of crowding out the Shekhinah from the world.[27] All his life he was on

his guard against it; at the very hour of his death he feared its approach. The true test of prayer, he said, is the feeling of humility it leaves behind. He set small value upon study because of the pride and arrogance it engenders. When there is much study, said one of his disciples, no doubt reflecting the mind of his teacher, there is little humility and piety. But there is also a pride which comes from humility, a sort of conscious knowledge of one's own rectitude. Israel earnestly warns against this form of vanity and prescribes the utter abnegation of Self as the method of overcoming it.[28]

Rabbi Israel did not despise learning; and, in fact, he regarded it as the most effective method by which the union with God can be attained; but in order that the study of the Torah may realize its highest purpose, it must be undertaken not for its own sake, nor for the intellectual pride which it brings with it, but for the purpose of stimulating piety.[29] He had the Jews of Lithuania and Poland in mind who only too often dominated their fellow Jews not by reason of their piety or warmth of heart, but by their learning, which, in many instances, served as a weapon of pride and oppression. Solomon Maimon in his autobiography left a picture of the position of the Talmid Hakham in those days: "Talmudic scholarship," he wrote, "constitutes the principal object of education among us. Wealth, physical attraction, and endowments of any kind, though appreciated by the people, do not in its estimation compare with the dignity of a good Talmudist. The Talmudist has the first claim on all offices and honorary posts in the community. Whenever he appears in the assembly, all rise before him and conduct him to the foremost seat. He is the confidant, the counsellor, the legislator, the judge of the plain man." [30]

Pure and unvarnished faith without intellectual sophistication, is the essence of Rabbi Israel's teachings. Of the Torah he recommended for study only such portions as assist the attainment of piety. The casuistic quibbling

of the scholars, spiritually unreproductive, he regarded as worse than useless. Satan, he says, does not tempt a man not to study, for, remembering the honors and dignity which it confers, he would not listen to him. But he leads him on to study those portions of the Talmud by which he can sharpen his wits, while keeping him away from such studies as lead to piety and the fear of Heaven.[31] While the great and learned rabbis were busy with their intellectual wranglings and the building up of towers of "scholarship" upon the point of a needle, Rabbi Israel pointed to another method of salvation. By curbing the insolence and snobbery of the so-called Talmid Hakham, by making *Abodah,* or Prayer, which is within the power of even the most ordinary man, the equal, if not superior, to learning, he abolished one of the most flagrant abuses from which the masses of the Jews suffered at that time.

VI

As in all Kabbalistic writings, the Soul occupies an important position in the teachings of Rabbi Israel. The spiritual element of life is nowhere spoken of with such depth and tenderness as in the words which are attributed to him. Man is the crown of creation, yet, it is not his physical form which distinguishes him above the animate and inanimate things in the universe, but the indwelling of God which is his soul. It is the channel by which the divine flows through his being and makes him unique and unchallenged. By endowing man with a soul, God implanted within him part of His own essence which makes him godlike. At the appointed time, when the Messiah will come, all the souls will flow together and return to be united with the Universal Soul, which is God. This will be the time when the Evil One will be conquered and the basis for a new world order will be established.

It is man's highest ideal, taught Israel Baal Shem Tob, to become the clear manifestation of God on earth. It

is thus that the ideal of the Man-God, or *Zaddik,* was evolved. While Israel was alive, he was himself the living symbol and embodiment of this ideal, but he well knew that, at least in its material form, this symbol would soon be broken. He, therefore, created what is perhaps the most daring innovation of the sect he had founded—the Zaddik.

It is the essence of the Zaddik that he realizes God always. This he accomplishes by fusing his soul with the Oversoul. In the Zaddik there is the largest number of sparks of divinity. They illumine not only his spiritual life, but his very casual conversation, indeed, his most trivial acts. God conducts himself with the Zaddik as does a father with his child when he teaches him to walk; first he leads him by the hand, and afterwards he removes himself from him a few steps, so that he may learn to walk alone.[32] At times it would, indeed, appear as though God had departed from the Zaddik, and he falls from his high estate into the filth and mire of the earth, but the eyes of God are always upon him and He raises him up again. The true Zaddik loves his people with a great and enduring love, and never sees any blemish in them. Rabbi Israel taught his followers to love the Zaddik and cling to him always, even when his conduct is not justified in their eyes, for it is by such unquestioning love of him that blessing is brought down upon them. The very contemplation of the Hassidic saint and the rehearsal of his miraculous deeds, is accounted by Israel as an act of piety.[33] It was thus that the background for the Zaddik, which later Hassidic leaders enriched and amplified with their own love and adoration, was provided.

He instructed his followers in the ethical application of Judaism; he taught them that religion is not an outward form, but an inner change of the heart. In an age when sharp business practices were common, he insisted upon the rule of probity to govern their relations with one another, and especially with those not of their own

faith. He bade them pray not only for themselves but also for their enemies and the Gentiles.[34] He preached charity and exemplified his doctrine by his own practice. He lived in great poverty. Though large sums of money passed through his hands, he distributed what he had among the poor.[35] Many people were guests at his table and he was liberal with the impecunious scholars who came to his door. His generosity to his disciples was overflowing; not a few subsisted on his stipends. When one day he was returning with his son from a visit to a rabbi who lived in fine style and had costly furnishings in his house, he said to him: "Thou must have envied the style and luxury of his living; but were the things thou hast seen belonging to me, I would have sold them and distributed the money among the poor." [36]

VII

Familiar as many of the teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob were, they nevertheless aroused the widest and wildest opposition on the part of the contemporary rabbis. They saw the whole structure of traditional Judaism undermined by him. He belittled the importance of Talmudic learning; he treated lightly many of the religious customs and ceremonies; he discouraged fasting and other penitential exercises; he was against fixed hours of worship; he scoffed at and ridiculed the official representatives of Judaism; he consorted with all sorts of people and entertained little respect for the established conventions of the times. A new sectarian movement threatening the stability of the old faith came into existence. Without separating himself from the established religious order, a new schism was born under his influence; without departing from the laws and practices of orthodox Judaism, a new Jewish brotherhood which differed in many essential points from the old *Kenesseth Israel,* "the Jewish community," was called into life. Not only was the outward form of the synagogue services changed,

but also its inner content and spirit. In order to escape the ridicule of their opponents, who laughed and poked fun at their strange motions and shoutings during the prayers, the Hassidism established for themselves separate houses of worship and adopted the *Nussah Ha-Ari,* or the Kabbalistic ritual of Isaac Luria, for their services. The rabbis regarded these innovations with the gravest concern, beholding in them a reversion to the heresies of Sabbatai Zebi and Jacob Frank. The Jews were surely not in a mood for a new religious schism, feeling that another division would help to complete their religious and moral disintegration.

At first they tried to ignore him; scoffed at his "ignorance," laughed at his teachings, and made fun of his strange and uncouth appearance. But soon they were awed by his popularity among the masses. While the learned rabbis were preaching to empty pews, thousands flocked to hear Baal Shem Tob's stories and anecdotes. They felt their position and influence in their communities threatened by his fame. When they realized that Israel could no longer be ignored, a vile and bitter campaign was launched against him. All sorts of absurd accusations were made by them. He was charged with drunkenness and incontinence; his unconventional converse was regarded as gross and vulgar.

When reports of the doings of his adversaries came to Rabbi Israel, he was determined to suffer in silence, in the firm belief that the future would vindicate his innocence as well as the justice of his cause. When he heard that Rabbi Jacob Joseph, the stormy petrel of the early Hassidic sect, was preparing to answer his teacher's accuser in his customary vitriolic style, Rabbi Israel earnestly pleaded with him to desist, saying that his opponents were bringing about their own destruction, that there was no need of lifting a finger in his defense.[37] Far from being annoyed or provoked by the attacks which were levelled against him, he was rather amused by them, knowing that

between his adversaries and himself there was a gulf of misunderstanding which could not be bridged.

Yet, bitter as was the antagonism of his opponents, it could not check the progress of the movement he had created. Persecution failed to dim the fire which Rabbi Israel had set ablaze. It spread with almost incredible rapidity to all classes, till, at the time of his death, forty thousand were said to have professed the faith he founded. Fanciful as these numbers may be, there is little doubt but that even before his passing Hassidism was a movement with numerous followers in several provinces of Eastern Europe. Little of what Rabbi Israel erected fell to the ground. He dreamed a glorious dream; he beheld a wondrous vision, and it was his good fortune to see them materialized during his own lifetime. An obscure man, with but scant learning, he conceived a high hope which he first confided to a small and intimate circle of friends, but not long afterwards he heard it speculated upon by thousands, till, in a surprisingly short time, it became the faith and conviction of widely separated masses of people.

VIII

The deaths of great men give rise to stirring legends. Moses died by a heavenly kiss and Zoroaster passed away in the midst of a terrifying cyclone. Even were many of the legends with which admiring disciples of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob surrounded his passing to be discounted, there is reason to believe that little bodily anguish accompanied the last hours of the founder of the Hassidic sect. It was said that he was destined to make his Ascension in a fiery chariot like the Prophet Elijah but that his generation was not worthy of such a miracle.[38]

During the festival of Passover Rabbi Israel was stricken by an illness from which he was never to recover. To the very end he is said to have retained his powers over

the upper and nether world. With trembling prayers his disciples surrounded the couch of their dying Master; while they were weeping, he comforted them, "I grieve not at my death, for I can see a door opening while the other is closing." [39] The Master of the Name lay stricken, but not vanquished, and the Angel of Death feared to approach him till he gave him permission. The humility he taught during his life did not forsake him at the hour of his death. "O vanity, vanity," he cried out when his strength was fast ebbing, "even in this hour of death thou darest to approach me with thy temptations, saying, 'Bethink thee, Israel, what a great funeral procession thou wilt have, because thou hast been so good and wise.' O vanity, vanity, beshrew thee." [40] On the first day of the Feast of Shabuoth, in the year 1760, sixty years after his birth, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob was taken away. The clocks which were in the house stopped ticking, which was a sign that the Master was no more.

Loving hands reared a modest cell over his grave where the pious ones come to pray to this day.

IX

Although many Hassidic leaders sat on his throne they did not inherit his place, for Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob could not be succeeded. He stood alone. He was the product of his time and environment. He was the creature of circumstances which were perhaps unparalleled in Jewish history. Countless influences went into the making of his life and character. There was in him something of the sage, prophet, poet, mystic, saint and philosopher. There was in him, above everything, an unbounded love for his people which has never been equalled by another. Their dumb and inarticulate voices spoke in and through him as through no one else. He was their friend, their companion, their tribune. He felt their pain and voiced their anguish. For this reason they loved and followed him blindly, fanatically, rapturously.

His warm heart pulsated for all classes of Jews, saints and sinners, rich and poor, simple and learned. He founded a democracy where all these outward things mattered little. His faith was, "All who love God love all his creatures." It was not for the profoundness of his learning or the novelty of his doctrine or for any other gift he may have possessed that he was loved so well, but for that great love and simplicity of his which encompassed all men under all circumstances. Such gifts are not inherited, such genius for leadership cannot be acquired. They are personal; they are individual.

X

The mists of obscurity which cover the life of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob served the critics of Hassidism to evolve a theory of his non-existence. The critical scholarship which denies the reality of Moses, the identity of Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, down to the great historical figures of our own time, did not find it difficult to express skepticism concerning the existence of the founder of Hassidism.[41] A French writer claims that the part which the supposed founder played in the formation of the movement was so negligible as to make his contribution a mere incident in the evolvement of the sect. Although Israel Baal Shem Tob is said to have been present at the time of the Frankist disputation, his name is not found on the roster of the rabbinical dignitaries who took part in the discussion. Few of the contemporary rabbis so much as mention his name; it was not until a long time after his death that Rabbi Israel began to loom large in the books that are dedicated to his movement. The book, "The Praises of Besht," which is wholly devoted to Rabbi Israel, is so obscure and mythical that when it appeared, readers were not quite decided as to whether it was written by a friend or a foe of Baal Shem Tob.

But after all the sources have been examined, when the myths and legends have been probed and analyzed, there

slowly rises the imposing, the mighty figure of a man with such powers of purpose and indomitable faith in God and Israel as to prove his existence beyond cavil or doubt. The very legends which have crowded to obscure him point to the existence of a shining figure behind the mists. If the opponents of Hassidism rarely single him out for their abuse it is because his life was so mild and gentle that it left little room for storms of controversy to break over his memory.

On the whole, it is a human picture which his biographers presented of their Master. The myths and legends which are reported about him, in no sense obliterate the essentially human aspects of his character. He is human in his birth and in his death, also in the whole chain of circumstances in between. No great superhuman miracles are reported to have taken place at his death, nor was it ever claimed for him that he put in an appearance after his demise, as was the case of other founders of faiths. Although there was the divine in Rabbi Israel, he was never regarded as divine. The strong aversion of the Jews to deification has been faithfully adhered to in his instance. His one daring story of Ascension, which he related in a letter to his brother-in-law is not without parallel in the lives of other Jewish teachers.[42]

Much of the majesty of the character of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob is that he was made of the stuff of which legends are spun. While human to the last detail, there was something fascinating and fantastic about him. The rabbis of the Talmud understood the secret of such a man when they said of Moses that he was half-human and half-divine. He was the last legendary figure in Jewish history. Stories are also told about Rabbi Elijah of Wilna, his eminent contemporary, but they are not of the same vein, for there is too much of the synagogue and the bookish atmosphere about him to make him radiantly fresh and pleasing.

Has Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob succeeded or failed?

It may be said that he did both. Perhaps nowhere in history has a man taken such a long stride forward and carried almost a whole people with him. He came as a holy optimist, throbbing with a sublime and joyous enthusiasm about God and man; a faith which he succeeded in planting in the hearts of millions of men. He was a poet and prophet who could quicken and inspire by the sheer force of his lofty vision. Under the spell of his name and influence a great movement embodying his ideal, was born, which became a spiritual force in the life of almost half of the Jewish people. Although not claiming for himself any other authority than his words and works inspired, countless men looked to him as the source of blessing and the fount of grace and goodness. If any mortal's name may be said to be written in the stars, that name is surely Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob.

Yet, he also failed. The phosphorescent flame he had kindled burned out rapidly and left a noisome odor behind. Although Hassidism continued as a living faith for nearly two hundred years, it is not the conviction that was born in the heart and brain of its founder and master. After the classical age of Rabbi Israel came the dull and prosaic days of less capable men when the gold of his doctrine tarnished. The hope which cheered and comforted so many despairing and despondent hearts and opened up such spiritual vistas of transcendent splendors, ended, after not many years, in delusion and distortion which would have broken the heart of the founder of Hassidism. Yet, it may be too early to speak of failure, for the genius of Rabbi Israel, after its temporary eclipse, is being reborn again. It may not be too much to expect, that when the need will be felt in Israel for the impact of great spiritual personalities, the Jews will return once more to the visions and insights which stirred in the breast of the sainted and gentle teacher of Medziboz.

Chapter V

CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION

For twelve years Rabbi Dob Baer, popularly known as the "Preacher of Meseritz," dominated the Hassidic movement. His influence on the sect was second only to that of the founder himself. The eyes of the Hassidim were now turned to Meseritz as they were formerly turned to Medziboz. Hundreds of followers came to him from all the countries where Hassidism was known. His court became the center of a new group of Hassidim. Whereas Rabbi Israel, the man of the people, associated with all sorts of men, walking about, pipe in mouth, chatting and entertaining whomever he met, Dob Baer attracted to himself a smaller but more intelligent group of followers. The magic of his personality and influence spread all the way from Meseritz to Lithuania, drawing to his doctrine such different types of men as the two Talmudist brothers, Phinehas and Samuel Horowitz, a mystic like Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev, and a philosopher like Sheneir Zalman of Ladi. Although a cripple, almost always in ill health, and seldom leaving his house, his mastery over the movement was complete and indisputable. The little sect that was founded not many years before, prospered under his leadership, till it spread, in a comparatively short time, to Volhynia, Lithuania and Little Russia, daily gathering new strength and influence.

Some time before Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob died, it became known that Rabbi Dob Baer would succeed to his throne. There were many circumstances favoring his choice. He enjoyed the Master's confidence and possessed many qualities for leadership which the turbulent times

demanded. There were other pretenders to the throne of Hassidism—Jacob Joseph and Phinehas of Koretz, both deserving pupils of their Master, withal it was upon the shoulders of their younger colleague that the choice had fallen. Indeed, Rabbi Israel made no secret as to whom he had in mind as his successor. During his frequent absence from Medziboz he charged Dob Baer with the task of carrying on his work and commanded his disciples to give him the respect and attention that his position demanded. Although the preference may have at first created resentment, that was soon forgotten, and Rabbi Dob Baer received the loyalty and support of all his colleagues.

What was the secret of Dob Baer's power and influence? What was it that drew so many hearts to him and inspired some of the most famous Hassidim of his time to follow him with such unquestioning loyalty and devotion? Many of his most celebrated disciples left their homes and spent months at a time in his company, regretting the hour they were compelled to leave. His every word was law unto them, his most commonplace utterance was regarded as divine revelation.[1] The very air of his house was considered filled with deepest mysteries, and it was felt that the profoundest problems were solved by his mere presence. Sheneir Zalman, gifted with a discerning and critical mind, testified that miracles were commonplaces in his house, and Israel of Koretz said: "Before I went for the first time to the Preacher of Meseritz I had studied eight hundred Kabbalistic books, yet, when I found myself in his presence I realized that I knew nothing." [2] What, then, was it which made this frail and ailing Polish rabbi exercise such power and influence over his contemporaries?

II

Dob Baer came to Hassidism from no inner, spiritual compulsion. There was no stirring struggle in his life which induced him to forsake the beaten path of Rab-

binism in which he was born and brought up to follow the new ideal. It was a sheer accident that he met Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob and fell under his influence. Were it not for that circumstance he might have remained an obscure, though learned, rabbi, and his very name would not have been known. For Dob Baer was a Talmudist of Talmudists, a strict observer of the tenets and principles that regulate the life of the Jewish people.

He was born in the little village of Lukatsch, in the Province of Volhynia, in the year 1710. His father, Abraham, was a teacher, very poor, but had many renowned rabbis for his forebears.[3] The local rabbi took an interest in him, and, when his father could not provide for the education that Jewish children received at that time, he took him under his care and instructed him in the words of the Torah. The young student worked hard and would only eat and sleep during such moments as he could snatch from his studies. The boy, whose childhood brought him nothing, read and studied like a madman. Early morning found him at his books, in the late night he was still bending over them. The tired eyes would sometimes close, as though pleading for rest, but the youthful scholar would soon master his fatigue and begin all over again. He studied standing, for he discovered it to be the best method to keep awake. His feet ached, and he could hardly walk without pain. This was nature's first warning. Had Dob Baer heeded it, he might have been much happier, but Hassidism would have been deprived of its greatest teacher.

Fate, however, decreed otherwise, and thus he continued his work, till, in a very short time, rumors of his exceptional talents began to fill the town. The local teachers were no longer competent to cope with the youthful genius. Baer was ambitious; he undoubtedly felt that he was destined to become a great rabbi. For the development of his mind larger opportunities than the small town could provide now seemed necessary, but his parents

were poor, hence helpless to do anything for the budding scholar. The good people of Lukatsch, it developed, would not be denied the honor of some day seeing one of their own placed in an eminent rabbinical position, hence gladly supplied the means. He was sent to Lemberg, a city of renowned scholars and schools of learning.[4]

There the boy redoubled his efforts. There were no longer the anxious eyes of his parents to watch over his material comforts. Baer took full advantage of his opportunity not to be disturbed in his studies by such immaterial things as eating and sleeping. He shortened the hours of rest and lengthened his study periods. The pious Jews of Lemberg pressed upon him invitations to come and share their modest fare, but too much time was to be lost in making such rounds. He stuck to his books and would not leave them, except on the holy Sabbath, when eating is considered a sacred rite. He studied with great energy, till Lemberg resounded with his fame. He mastered the Talmud and was on intimate terms with all its numerous commentaries. The Torah no longer held secrets that were not familiar to him.

His labor was rewarded, for, after a few years, he returned to his native city with flattering testimonials as to his scholarship. He was now, according to the standards of his time, ripe for marriage. Marriage increased his responsibilities, not his happiness; for, unable to support himself, he found it all the harder to provide for a family. He was facing life without a plan, without a purpose, without hope. The woman he was made to marry brought him the testimony of noble ancestry, but no dowry.

The rabbinate, in whose service he had spent many years, lay open to him, but he had other ambitions. His soul rebelled against making profit of the Torah. The Talmud warns against soiling the crown of the Torah for sordid gain, and Dob Baer heeded its admonition. In a large city like Lemberg, the knowledge may have also

come to him that the rabbinate was by no means a domain in which the rabbi is the sole and undisputed sovereign, but that there were other pretenders to the scepter of Jewish leadership. His self-confidence began to break under the strain of supporting a growing family who were asking for bread which he was unable to supply.

He took to teaching. It was a poorly paid profession, but it enabled him to maintain his independence. Children had always been his preference; he loved their innocence and their simple and unaffected hearts. He remembered how he used to play with them in his father's house, and he still longed for their company. Besides, his father was getting on in years and he was eager to continue the tradition of the family. Teaching was a preference he possessed in common with Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. Both made their way to the hearts of the Jews by first winning the love and confidence of their little ones.

His spare time was divided between his books and the contemplation of nature. He no longer lived in retirement. There was a world of yearning in his heart, a passion to recapture something of his lost childhood. The cloistered student-life he lived produced on him an opposite effect, and his heart longed for the wide and open spaces of nature. An inborn poetic instinct made him spend many hours amid the wild and crowded stretches of forests and hills surrounding his native village. The long, solitary walks filled his heart with new ambitions. Vague and unformed intimations of the future came to him, filling him with new and unexpected hope.

His books, too, were not neglected, and he returned to them with greater zeal than before. Now a new passion began to stir within him. He made his acquaintance with the Kabbalah, that wonderland of romance and poetry which stirred and fascinated him. There was nothing strange or unusual about his new occupation. Students of the Torah were in the habit of supplementing their knowl-

edge of the revealed Law with the secret wisdom of the Kabbalah. It proved the spark which set his heart aflame. He spent many days and nights in its company, and contemplated its alluring beauty as he walked through the woods, or by the side of a running brook.

It was the Lurian Kabbalah, the mystic doctrine practiced in those days, with all its rigorous and ascetic demands which took possession of him, as it did of thousands of other Jews of his time. Its solemn and austere call, summoning the Jews to a life of sacrifice and discipline, bidding them follow the hard and thorny road of sacrifice and renunciation, while at the same time holding out the most extravagant promises of rewards in the world to come made a powerful appeal to him, and he became one of its ardent devotees. He took to fasting for days at a time. His comforts, never too many, he now denied himself entirely. By performing all the prescribed rules of penance, his health, already weakened by lack of nourishment, became seriously impaired. He grew irritable, morose, melancholy, characteristics unsuited to the teaching profession. For the second time, but now with broken health and a starving family, he found himself facing the prospects of an uncertain future.

III

In his despair, Baer bethought himself of the *Maggidim,* itinerant preachers who occasionally visited his village for the purpose of exhorting the people to piety and good works. Although regarded lightly by the scholars, they were held in high esteem by the masses who enjoyed their discourses, spiced, as they often were, with entertaining and amusing stories and anecdotes. While some of these preachers were little better than high-class beggars who richly deserved the censure passed on them, others, on the contrary, were men of high character and integrity and earnestly devoted to their people. Aside from their discourses, these traveling preachers were held

in esteem for the news and gossip they brought of what was going on in the communities they visited. Not only the dullards and uninstructed, but scholars as well, would often close their learned books and gather about these news-vendors to hear to their fascinating stories.

The Maggidim made a powerful impression on Dob Baer. He listened to their discourses and fell under the spell of their eloquence. He felt himself as one of their guild, for, is not preaching only teaching from a pulpit? He resolved to follow their profession. Dob Baer was a whole man; he loved life; he was on good terms with the world; preaching appealed to him as the realization of the vague dreams and ambitions that filled his heart. He was to travel from community to community; cover large distances; come in contact with every variety of men; get to know the world. His intelligence, his learning, his energy would be brought into play. He dreamed of the great audiences that would hang on his words, of the hearts he would touch, of the emotions he would stir, and the sinners he would bring back to God and the Torah.

Rabbi Dob Baer became a preacher. He visited community after community and preached in synagogue after synagogue. He was eminently successful; for, warm-hearted and enthusiastic, he had little difficulty in winning the hearts of his audience. He possessed all the requirements necessary for the pulpit. He was proficient in the Talmudic and Haggadic literature; he could illustrate the most difficult subjects with stories and parables. He was fiery, he was eloquent, he was impassioned, and his spoken word was athrob with life and interest. He addressed large congregations and found no difficulty in convincing and impressing them. The very circumstance that, although a preacher for but a few years, he was never known by any other name than "The Preacher," is sufficient testimony to the effectiveness he must have attained in this profession. After making the rounds of many

towns and villages he was called to occupy preaching positions in Koretz and Dubno, where he attained to considerable fame and popularity. Scholars admired him for the extent of his learning, and the simple-hearted folk for his ability to make the most complicated subjects alive with human interest.

After a few years of growing reputation, Dob Baer was compelled to give up preaching. The demands of the pulpit proved too strenuous for his undermined health. His old malady returned and grew steadily worse. His tenseness and high-strung nervous temperament were no match for his weakened constitution. It was before the twenty-minute oration became the standard of successful preaching. Preachers in the times of Dob Baer worked long and hard. Nothing less than a three-hour sermon would satisfy the spiritually greedy congregation. He never learned to husband his strength and surrendered himself completely to his work. His sermons were nervous, tense and virile; hearts fluttered at his words as leaves in a storm. His feet, weakened in his childhood, could not stand the strain imposed upon them by long standing, and they developed a malady that almost crippled him. His ascetic life aggravated his condition, for he denied himself the fuel to replenish his waning strength. His fasts continued to be long and unbroken; he recited his prayers with copious tears and self-abasement. The result was that his health became a matter of grave concern to his family.

Urged to consult a physician, Baer resisted. The man who preached God as the Healer would not submit to human remedies. It was at this time that the countryside began to buzz with the fame of Israel Baal Shem Tob. The most miraculous cures were reported to have been effected by him; patients flocked to him from most of the towns and villages. The ailing preacher was urged to visit him, but refused, for, together with the stories of his cures, reports of the strange and novel doctrine he was

preaching circulated; these made Baer skeptical of Israel and his reputed cures. When at last his condition became steadily worse and he could no longer disregard the appeals of his anxious family, he consented to journey to Medziboz.

IV

The meeting of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob and Rabbi Dob Baer became a turning point in the history of Hassidism. Two minds, one dominated chiefly by emotion, and the other no less enthusiastic and imaginative, but touched with a high sense of reason and logic, met; the result was the creation of a movement that was destined to encircle the whole of Jewry.

At first their meeting was, at least as far as Dob Baer was concerned, disappointing. An intellectual tournament was what he had expected. He came prepared for a matching of minds. A long and learned Talmudic discussion, he thought, would take place between them. He expected Israel to defend the challenge of his opponents with long and ingeniously marshalled passages from the Talmud, which he would refute with equally authoritative statements from other sources, a battle royal of wits to delight the heart of any Polish rabbi. Instead, he found a man dressed in the coarse and unconventional garb of a peasant, ceaselessly smoking his pipe, and talking of peasants, horses and like irrelevant matters. He regretted the journey, returned to his lodgings, and ordered his coachman to prepare for his homeward journey at the break of day.

Although Baal Shem was cool to his visitor, he was far from being indifferent to him; in fact, he waited long for his coming. Through many years of weariness and disappointment, he looked to the appearance of just such a man. He was already beginning to cast about for one who would qualify as his successor. Hassidism was in need of the missionary spirit; it called for the man who

combined deep enthusiasm with profound learning; yet, among his numerous followers there was no man who claimed these qualifications. After many years of almost hopeless waiting, fortune brought the very man to his door.

He knew Rabbi Baer; he heard him speak and saw how he mastered great audiences by the power of his word. He was not a dry-as-dust scholar, but one who was capable of deep emotions. He heard him illuminate difficult passages of the Torah with the ease and grace of an orator. He admired his learning, his earnestness, and the zeal and passion that lighted up his message. In short, he was a man after his own heart, the very man to create and lead a great movement.

Now that good fortune had placed him in his reach he must act cautiously, circumspectly. He must not frighten or overwhelm him with eagerness. He must not allow himself to betray the joy that his appearance had brought him. He must act with calmness and self-possession in his presence, and even make it appear as though he was utterly indifferent to him. He entertained him with trivialities which he knew were far removed from the learned rabbi's interest, till he almost exasperated him. At midnight, when Baer had left and was making preparations to return to his home, he sent for him. A discussion followed which Hassidic legend embellished colorfully.[5]

Only the barest outline of what happened that night has been recorded. Israel asked him whether he was an adept in the Kabbalah. Upon receiving an affirmative reply, he opened the "Etz Hayim," a Kabbalistic work by Hayim Vital, a copy of which lay on the table, and asked the meaning of a certain passage. Dob Baer interpreted the text after his own light. Rabbi Israel was not satisfied. When the visiting rabbi insisted upon the correctness of his understanding of the words of the book, Israel said: "Yes, the words thou hast mastered cor-

rectly, but thou hast not penetrated into their inner spirit." [6] Then he proceeded to reveal the hidden meaning of the passage, whereupon the room became flooded with the radiance of heavenly light and angels. Shadows fled, sleep was gone, hour after hour passed. Early morning found master and pupil still bending over the ancient tome, the very words whereof gleamed like shining seraphim.[7]

It was the night in which Hassidism was born. A new convert, who was to place its flaming sword into thousands of hands, was won for the struggling movement. Dob Baer began to see everything in a new light. Baer felt as though a veil had been lifted from his eyes and a new spirit had come over him. Rabbi Israel instructed him in many things he did not know. He taught him, for instance, the secret of spells and the language of birds and flowers.[8] He also taught him the true meaning of the words of the Torah, revealing the depths below the depths and the divine spirit that instructs its very letters. Unwilling as he was to go to Israel Baal Shem Tob before, he found it now harder to go away. He resolved never to leave his master and became a member of his household.

V

Solicitous as Rabbi Israel was about all his pupils, he bestowed an extra measure of love upon this, his favorite disciple. He divined his future and did everything to prepare him for his task. Dob Baer possessed all the qualities that the leadership of the sect he was to dominate required. He had courage, he had personality; above all, he was noted for his Talmudic learning. The latter proved the most important equipment for the task before him, for soon Hassidism was to fall upon sad and evil days and scholarship was to be its stoutest defense. So far Hassidism had been largely a folk movement, recruiting its followers from the lower strata of the Jewish

population. If the faith, however, was not to degenerate into a sectarian movement but embrace the whole of the Jewish people, it must make its appeal and influence felt also among such learned classes of the people as heretofore remained indifferent to it. For such a task Baer was eminently fitted. He had many qualities that the other followers of Rabbi Israel lacked. He had the emotion and imagination of the preacher combined with the learning and wisdom of the scholar; he had the vision and earnestness of the prophet joined to the practical acumen of the worldly man of affairs. Also he possessed a keen and penetrating knowledge of human nature and no little organizing ability. In the sad and bitter days to come upon the movement, he was like the able general who knows how to mass his regiments in the strongest strategic positions. It is one of the fundamental needs of leadership to be able to surround oneself with sound advisers. Israel Baal Sham Tob possessed this quality in a high degree, for he never had reason to regret his choice. And thus, when in 1760 his brief span of life was over, Dob Baer was elevated to the vacant leadership with little, if any, dissension.

VI

Dob Baer made few changes in the inner composition of the sect he was called upon to lead, but made Meseritz, instead of Medziboz, the capital of Hassidism. The shifting of the center of the movement was a stroke in illustration of the wise statesmanship of the new leader. To thousands of Hassidim, Medziboz became a hallowed memory associated with the name of Rabbi Israel. The spirit of the founder hovered over it and many of his admirers might have resented the association of any other name therewith. It was also the home of the family of the founder of Hassidism. Although they accepted their father's successor, his presence in the city might have proved a source of embarrassment to them.[9]

Medziboz was no longer the strategic center it was in the days of Rabbi Israel. The movement made considerable progress in the interval and a more central location would add to its strength. It would be restrictive to the growth and development of Hassidism were its name to become associated with a particular locality, no matter how much sentiment there was attached to it. Meseritz had the advantage of a favorable geographical position. It was situated on the very frontier of Poland and Ukrainia; it opened a window on the particular countries that Baer hoped to conquer. With Meseritz as a base, he could conduct his movement in the new countries and territories that he was already dreaming of winning over to his faith.

In no other respect was the movement changed by Baer either inwardly or outwardly. The demands of the times were for organization, not innovation. The gains made by the sect had to be consolidated and its influence spread to wider areas and greater numbers. Although it was growing steadily, its authority was so far local, spreading but little beyond the confines of the Carpathian Mountains where it originated. To extend its realm to wider borders was the need of the hour, and for this work no man was better qualified than the new leader.

VII

Were Rabbi Dob Baer alive to-day he would have been considered an outstanding organizer; for what Hassidism became in the course of the next fifty years was chiefly due to his organizing talent. He not only conducted the campaign in person, but also fashioned the tools and implements wherewith it was to be carried on. Large and eager crowds gathered daily at his doors, but he deliberately denied himself to them that he should have all the more time to give to his pupils into whom he breathed his spirit. Thanks to the magic of his personality, he attracted a group of men of unusual talents.[10] A student of human

nature, and possessing the psychic gift as few other men, he selected from among his followers only such disciples as were best qualified to carry out his purpose. These he trained personally, till they became fit instruments to bring his faith to such parts of the world as were as yet not acquainted with it.

A preacher himself, he knew the value of the spoken word and made full use of its advantage. He filled the countryside with preachers who presented the teachings of Hassidism in a pleasant and agreeable manner. Two such men were Israel and Azariel of Plotzk, who were noted for their learning, eloquence and piety.[11] They visited many communities and conducted vigorous campaigns. They organized Hassidic conventicles and stimulated fresh life and interest wherever they appeared. They abolished old practices and established the new Hassidic order. Solomon Maimon, a contemporary of the activities of these apostles of Hassidism, thus described their work: "They wandered from town to town, and everywhere they sought out men with heart and flesh, and then turned them to God and urged them to go to Meseritz. Thus they performed great deeds and aroused the spirit of their hearers." [12]

A visit to Meseritz served the cause of Hassidism better than any number of sermons or discussions. For Rabbi Baer, although by this time weak and feeble, knew how to dramatize himself in a superb manner. He conducted his court with great splendor and understood how to dazzle the eyes of those who came to visit him. His very feebleness and the rarity of his public appearances gave added weight to the occasion when he condescended to show himself to his adoring followers.[13] On no other day but the Sabbath did any mortal eye, outside of his intimate disciples, behold him. When he appeared, his lean and emaciated figure, tall and majestic, filled his beholders with a sort of mystic transport. Again, one must resort to Solomon Maimon, who, although skeptical of Has-

sidism, left a graphic description of one such audience with the Great Preacher of Meseritz:

"Accordingly, on the Sabbath, I went to his solemn meal, and found there a large number of men who had met here from various quarters. At length, the great man appeared in his awe-inspiring form, clothed in white satin. Even his shoes and snuff box were white, this being among the Kabbalists the color of grace. He gave to every new-comer his salaam, that is, his greeting. He sat down at the table, and during the meal a solemn silence reigned. After the meal was over, the superior struck a solemn inspiring melody, held his hands for some time upon his brow. . . . Thereupon, the superior began to deliver a sermon, for which the verses recited served as his text, so that, although they were disconnected verses, taken from different parts of the Holy Scriptures, they were combined with as much skill as if they formed a single whole. What was still more extraordinary, every one of the new-comers discovered in that part of the sermon which was found in his verse, something that had special reference to the facts of his own spiritual life." [14]

VIII

Under Rabbi Baer's leadership, Hassidism made steady progress. He kept the ranks intact and added to their strength and numbers. The success of his movement reached out not only to many parts of Poland, but to Lithuania as well, planting its banner in Wilna, the very citadel of rabbinical Judaism. Much of his triumph was no doubt due to the personality of the leader and his gift for organization, yet, it must be admitted, that the conditions of the times, too, contributed to his success. The rabbinical *Kahal* (government), known as the Council of Four Lands, which regulated the religious life of Polish Jewry, was dissolved just at the time when Hassidism, under the leadership of Dob Baer, was at its

sharpest ascendancy; in its absence there was no centralized authority to carry out the mandates of the forces opposed to the new faith.[15] It is true that the influence of Elijah of Wilna was equal, if not stronger, than the combined authority of the Council, but he was a saint and a recluse rather than a man of the world. When he, at last, awoke to the "danger" of Hassidism, it was already too late to prevent its spread and progress. Feeble and even energetic attempts to eradicate the "heresy" were made by other men, but it had already taken possession of the hearts of too many people to be any longer successfully extricated.

Dob Baer's last days were both sad and bitter. He was called upon to pay the price of his success. The propaganda that he conducted with such energy met with stubborn resistance on the part of its opponents. Inch by inch its advance was contested; when it stealthily crossed the Lithuanian border no time was lost in the attempt to crush it. The greatest name in all Jewry, that of the Gaon of Wilna, was conjured up against the growing sect; and when, in 1772, he was induced to issue his stern ban against it, consternation fell upon all who had embraced the interdicted doctrine. It was a struggle that taxed the quality of Rabbi Baer's leadership to the utmost. Against him was arrayed the most powerful man in all Jewry. Poland and Lithuania listened to his voice, with a following all over the world.

To make matters still worse, Dob Baer no longer felt himself equal to the heavy strain imposed upon his weakened health. Although but sixty-three, he was facing the crisis in a gravely impaired physical condition. His early ascetic life told against him just when he needed his strength most. Like the commander dying in the midst of a decisive battle, he summoned his followers to a secret conclave and outlined the general course of the campaign to them, but surrendered his sword to younger and

stronger hands. He died on December 15, 1773, surviving his great teacher, Israel Baal Shem Tob, by barely thirteen years.

The grief over his departure was deep and genuine, perhaps even greater than the sorrow that accompanied the passing of Rabbi Israel, because no such clouds of disaster hung over the movement at his death. But the enemies of Hassidism rejoiced at his loss as the passing of a serious menace to the unity and continuity of the Jewish faith, thinking, no doubt, that, dying at so crucial a time, the movement he had helped to create would die with him. Little did they know that he was the master of a faith that was destined to survive his tomb.

IX

More than Rabbi Israel, Dob Baer may be regarded as the philosopher of Hassidism; he was the founder of whatever doctrinal side there is to the movement. Mystic and Kabbalist though he was, his ideas are sane and rational, and, considering that they were not written by himself but by his relative, Rabbi Solomon of Lutzk, who, as he confesses, was not always certain of their meaning, they are stated with surprising clearness.

He preaches the omnipresence of God with the passion not of the philosopher, but the zealot. It is the core and essence of all his religious thinking. Just as before Creation, the world was in God, so is God in the world now. God is not only the source and origin of all things, but also their quickening and vitalizing energy. It is in this sense that he interprets the words of Nehemiah, "Thou preservest from all." [16] There is a diffusion of God in all things, but the degree of his manifestation differs according to the higher and lower level of the universe.

Since nothing can be conceived without God, there is something of His essence also in the apparent evil of life. Whenever, therefore, anything appears to us absurd, ridiculous or bad, as though it were without God and,

therefore, without good, it is because of our incomplete knowledge; for, were we able to penetrate into the inwardness of things, we should discover that there is nothing in the world without its element of God and goodness. What we, hence, call evil, is nothing but the limited number of "sparks" of the Living Glory. Man attains to perfections when he succeeds in enlarging the number of "sparks" within him so as to make him godlike. The flowing together of all the "sparks" in the universe, and their union with God, will usher in the Messianic kingdom. Baer was so thorough and consistent in his pantheism that he would not deny the possibility of divine "sparks" even to idols, without which their very imaginary existence would have been unthinkable.[17]

He taught men to regard everything under the aspect of the spiritual. Things are to be avoided or coveted not for the physical pain or pleasure they give us, but for the measure in which they help to further or retard the spiritual essence of our being.[18] But since there is nothing, however bad, which is without an element of goodness, there are few things which may not be made to serve the higher purpose. Eating and drinking may thus become a holy act, and the sight of a beautiful woman awaken in us reflections of the most ecstatic nature.[19]

Rabbi Baer spoke of Prayer almost in a sensuous way. The miracle of prayer is only then consummated when man joins his soul with that of God, as lovers join their bodies. Prayer to be effective must be inward, not outward; spiritual, not mechanical; for worse than no prayer at all are the prayers of the hypocrites, who "wrap themselves in prayer shawls and adorn themselves with phylacteries, but their hearts are not with them." [20]

Such prayers are dead and powerless; they cannot raise themselves to Heaven. True prayer is only possible when it is performed with ecstasy. Ecstasy transforms the lifeless letters of our prayers into living and burning souls. Baer's own prayers were fervent, convulsive, and full of

rapture. By means of such prayers we are able to break through the corroding and corrupting influences of life and overrule the laws of nature. Ecstasy may be attained not only by physical means, such as swinging the body, but by meditation.

There is matter and spirit in all things, even the words of the Torah.[21] There are men, he said, who huddle over their books in the study of the Torah, but because their hearts are cold, it is the body and not the spirit of the Torah that they feel. It is not good for man to study overmuch, for thereby he may neglect the exercise of piety, which is the greater of the two. Nor shall a man be overpunctilious in the carrying out of the divine commands, for it may be the design of the Evil One to cast him into depression in order to hinder his service of God.[22]

Baer magnified the institution of Zaddikism to a degree which was undreamed of by its founder. His hands created the image that beclouded the minds of the Polish Jews for several generations. Basing his claim upon the verse from the Psalms, "The righteous (Zaddik) is the foundation of the world," [23] he ascribed to him powers and functions that are as absurd as they are fantastic.

Thus, the Zaddik became not only the vicar of God upon earth, but he is in many respects like the Deity itself, and in the imagination of some, even supersedes God. God reveals himself in him and in his most trifling acts. There is nothing physical or material about the Zaddik, and his most inconsiderate deeds deserve as much study as though they were revelations. He is the symbol of the true inwardness of life; to him alone is given the power of drawing out the will and favor of the Deity. The Zaddik draws spiritual nourishment from the throne of God as the seed derives its sustenance from the earth. Nature reveals its hidden spiritual resources only to him, and he can make the most commonplace things serve the highest end. The Divine Sparks inherent in matter whis-

per to him their secrets, and by his touch profane things are sanctified.

His dominion, however, is not only over the spiritual but over the material world as well, for the power is given to him to confer physical blessings or withhold them. The wise Hassid will, hence, always cling to the Zaddik, as the child clings to his parent for the benefits he receives from him. The Hassid's relation to the Zaddik, however, must not be an ideal, or platonic one. He must visit him, make pilgrimages to him, his hands always filled with rich gifts. Since the conduct of the world and the calling forth of divine grace is the special task and mission of the Zaddik, it is incumbent on his faithful ones to attend to all his personal wants, so that he may surrender himself to the service of God undisturbed. It is thus that the doctrine, which for many years ruled the lives of thousands of Hassidim, was fashioned.

X

Jewish mystics had a difficult time in dealing with the problem of God and the world. From the very beginning there was an incongruity, a contradiction which was hard to reconcile. The Jews knew full well who their God was. No mistake was possible on this point. It was all written down in clear and plain writing. He is an absolute spirituality, without shape or form. He is Infinite, an *En-Sof* who fills the whole universe. No place or room in cosmic space is conceivable without Him. All this is so plain, so evident, that the merest tyro knows it.

Here it is that the trouble first begins. The very clarity and simplicity of the Jewish position of God, arouses a swarm of difficulties. The very longing for union and desire for oneness on the part of the Jewish philosophers raises the question, If God is infinite, how could this finite world arise? God is spirit, the world is matter. God is perfect, the world is faulty. How could this limited and defective universe exist side by side with

the unlimited and perfect God without crowding Him out of his domain? By the very nature of the case a break, a split, a dualism is created where the Jew was taught there was only one.

Jewish mystics in Babylon conceived the idea of intermediary angels who were depended upon to reconcile this contradiction. Still, there was a quasi-physical phase which proved unacceptable to the later mystics. This was reflected in the doctrine of *Zimzum,* or "Concentration," according to which theory the Infinite was thought to concentrate Himself, so as to make room for the finite world of matter.[24]

Although the thought was not novel, it was not until it fell into the hands of Isaac Luria that it assumed the dignity of a philosophical explanation of the relation of God to the universe. Through Rabbi Baer the theory of Zimzum, which he inherited from the father of the Practical Kabbalah, became a cornerstone in the Hassidic ideology.[25] Just as God in His love for the uncreated universe limited Himself, and thus descended to the level of the world and man, so must the latter strive for union with God, for it is only when the finite disappears that Satan will be slain and the Messiah will come.

By the power of Zimzum, i.e., by concentrating all his thought upon one focal point, man can so blend his Self with his Creator as to become one with Him. This is the way of Ecstasy. When in such a state, one becomes oblivious of the world, and may even break through the laws of nature. While it is within the province of every man to attain to such a state, it comes most natural to the Zaddik who lives in a constant state of ecstasy.[26]

When Baer speaks of Israel and the Land of Israel, the philosopher and mystic becomes also a poet. Words such as have at one time been spoken by Judah Halevi, fall from his lips. Israel is represented by him as a higher species of the human race. He is the heart and kernel of the world. He draws the divine grace upon mankind, and

it is from him that the nations of the earth derive their sustenance. God and Israel form a perfect and absolute unity. No separation between them is thinkable. God's relation to Israel is that of father and son. Just as a father always bears in his heart the image of his child, so is God always mindful of his favorite, Israel. The union of God and Israel makes for the harmony and completeness of the universe. The world exists and has its being because it is part of the soul-life of the Jewish people.

As Israel is unique, so is also the Land of Israel. There is a peculiar relation between Zion and the people of Israel which is not shared by any other nation of the earth. Zion sustains and nourishes Israel as the world is sustained and nourished by them. Palestine is the inspiration, the influence of which extends all over the world.[27] Were it not for that influence, it would shrink and dry up like a withered leaf. Although, due to his physical condition, Dob Baer could never hope to visit Palestine himself, he amply made up for his disappointment by implanting in the hearts of his disciples and followers an abiding love for the Promised Land.

XI

The source of Rabbi Baer's strength is hidden in darkness. For all the efforts of his biographers, it is still hardly more than legend. We know next to nothing of his personal life, if, indeed, he had any. The legends that come down present us with a silhouette rather than a portrait of the man. He did possess neither the freshness and spontaneity of Rabbi Israel nor his amiability and good humor. And yet, no other Hassidic leader was so adored by his followers. He was regarded as superhuman; many of the stories told of Rabbi Israel centered also about him. It was said that to him were revealed the same sources of wisdom as to Baal Shem Tob. But though loved and admired by his pupils, and regarded by his Hassidim with the same esteem and reverence as was

the founder of the sect, he retained, like the latter, his simple and unaffected nature. When he saw that fame came to him, he is said to have exclaimed, "What sin have I committed to be afflicted with such widespread popularity?"

No other man stamped his personality upon the Hassidic movement as did Dob Baer. Out of the genius of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob has Hassidism come, but it was Dob Baer who gave it form and direction. The frail and fragile Polish rabbi born in a little village in Volhynia, lived to see a considerable portion of the Jewish people of his time worship at his feet. He extended the domain of Hassidism beyond the dreams of its founder.

Although possessing a great and warm heart, he was not, like the founder, a visionary. He was a consummate diplomat, and an organizer who understood the technique of mass psychology. He managed to surround himself with mystery and knew how to give grace and color to his every movement. He had the gift of being all kinds of a man—Talmudist, Kabbalist, a fluent preacher, and a patient worker. Like his teacher, he was not a maker of books and left no works of his own behind. He was too busy to cultivate the art of writing. Unlike his master, however, he was not without a suggestion of vanity, for, though not writing himself, he was not averse to securing his wisdom for posterity, and commanded his kinsman and disciple, Solomon of Lutzk, to collect his utterances and print them in book form, which in time appeared in two volumes, *Likute Amarim,* "A Collection of Sayings," and *Likute Yekarim,* "A Collection of Gems." But Baer was not so fortunate in his Boswell as was Israel, for Solomon lacked the grace and smoothness of style, which was the gift of Rabbi Jacob Joseph.

Although Rabbi Baer was the architect of Hassidism, he was not its poet. There was lacking in him that novelty and spontaneity which made the utterances of Israel Baal Shem Tob so fresh and original. He suggested little of the mountain breeziness in which the movement was con-

ceived and born. To the very end of his life he remained the Talmudist. For twelve years he was the guiding genius of Hassidism, and made not a few additions of his own to its teachings. Upon the foundation of his Master he reared his system, weaving into it strands of his own texture. He presented in a new, although not always more attractive form, what he heard or absorbed from his teacher. The spirit breathed by its creator he clothed in flesh and tissue calculated to withstand the buffetings of time and fortune.

The *Mashal,* or "parable," was not so readily present in the mouth of Dob Baer as it was in that of his teacher, which made the latter's utterances peculiarly memorable. An *Halakhist,* or "legalist," all his life, he seldom attempted the popular vein. This is why, although idealized and idolized by his scholars and co-workers, there are comparatively few popular legends associated with his name.

Chapter VI

CONFLICT AND VICTORY

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob was not a man of letters; if he did not actually despise books, he entertained but the feeblest respect for them. He saw their enslaving effect and hated their tyranny. Himself a creature of feeling and emotion, rather than a man of learning, he instinctively rejected the authority of books —his opponents maintained—without knowing their contents. He saved religion by taking it out of the sacred buildings dedicated to its name into the open air, as many other religious reformers had done before him. He taught a doctrine which was independent of books and scribes—the doctrine which came to him during his wanderings in the primeval forests of the Carpathian Mountains. He taught worship of God with a fiery and self-sacrificing devotion, rather than with the prescribed formulas of books. This doctrine he brought to the lowly and half-educated Jews who were despised and looked down upon by their learned and aristocratic brethren.

Yet, flattering as such doctrine was to the ignorant and uncultured village Jews, it could gain little popularity among the enlightened and intelligent classes of the people who respected the authority of learning. Since time immemorial the Jews had been a people of books, and the credentials of learning were their highest patent of nobility. Books have been to the Jews what swords and armies are to other nations. The Oral Tradition has had its place of honor among the Jews, but it was not until

that tradition was written down in books that it dominated the life of the Jewish people for nearly two thousand years. The written word carried the faith and teachings of the Jews to the distant ages, the articulate voice without which the thoughts of the past would have vanished like a vision.

There is ample evidence that Rabbi Israel later realized the power and influence of books and learning, and was eager to surround himself with scholars more learned than himself. The radiant personality of Baal Shem Tob had no need of such artificial authority as books confer. Wherever he went he attracted new hearts and won new souls by the sheer magic of his presence. But those were the heroic days of Hassidism, and he knew that soon the more prosaic times of smaller men and less exalted minds would come, when there would be need to garner the seeds he had sown, so that hearts that did not know him might be warmed and inspired by his teachings. The doctrine he was preaching already extended far beyond the remote corner of Poland, where it originated, and reached out to parts of Europe where lived Jews of different temperament and upbringing. To make sure of the triumph of Hassidism in those parts of the world also, other methods than those originally planned were needed.

Rabbi Baer, the famous Preacher of Meseritz, did a great deal to save Hassidism from the taint and taunt of ignorance that was imputed to it. A Talmudic scholar himself, he knew how to draw to his movement many men from the learned classes of Jewry and bring them under his influence. Though an inspired preacher and master of the spoken word, he never acquired the skill and facility of writing. While he dominated thousands by his magnificent presence, Hassidism stood in need of a man to preach to a much larger parish; indeed, to the whole world.

It was the good fortune of the young sect that such a

man soon appeared. If Hassidism developed into an empire, the domain of which was no longer limited to its two capitals, Medziboz and Meseritz, but made the whole world ring with its fame, the credit for this achievement is in no small measure due to Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polona. While the faithful still gathered in Meseritz to be inspired by the living symbol and embodiment of the movement, the future of Hassidism no longer depended upon these personal contacts, for its words and teachings could now be read in a number of books that were dedicated to their exposition. If Israel was the Prophet and Dob Baer the High Priest of Hassidism, Jacob Joseph was the Prometheus who made its sacred fire accessible to vast numbers of men.

While there may have been sporadic tracts setting forth the tenets and teachings of the movement, it was not until the coming of Jacob Joseph that Hassidism may be said to have gained its literary master. The missionary zeal of the Jews which lay dormant for many years, flamed up in him with concerted force and energy. He became the sword of Hassidism while Israel and Dob Baer commanded its forces. He created the slogans and battle cries while they conducted the campaign. They originated the theory, wrote its philosophy and established the system and method, while he charged upon the enemy and secured victory.

Jacob Joseph did not possess the winning personality of Israel, nor the slow, patient and methodical ways of Don Baer, for he was impetuous and irascible; but he had courage and determination and was unafraid of consequences. There is a gap in our information about the life of the Rabbi of Polona. One time we see him as a brilliant scholar, poring over the folios of the Talmud, intolerant of innovations, and hating, even persecuting Hassidism. The next time we behold him hurling threats and denunciations against his former colleagues, as aggressively enthusiastic about Hassidism as he was

formerly unreasonably opposed to it. A scholar, but at the same time capable of fine enthusiasm, he became the most passionate protagonist of the new faith he had embraced.

He had the ability of writing and, like himself, his style is terse, vigorous, nervous and poignant, and not infrequently spiced with irony. He parodied and caricatured his enemies, and called them many bitter names. Though himself a rabbi, a descendant of a long and distinguished line of rabbinical authorities, he was perhaps the most bitter and uncompromising opponent of Rabbinism that Hassidism produced. The spiritual blindness and decadence of the Jews he attributed to the rabbis, whom he called "Little foxes who despoil the vineyard." [1] He accused them of indifference to the interests of the common people, and attacked them for their casuistry, dialecticism and the superior airs they were giving themselves.

Jacob Joseph was the first of his group who made Hassidism articulate. He gave voice and color to the movement. Whereas before it was weak and timid, afraid to make itself heard, it became suddenly aggressive, refuting charges, hurling back accusations, engaging in a frontal attack all along the line of Rabbinism. He was a duellist who seldom missed his opponent; the weapons he forged were used by almost all his successors. While the rabbis persisted in writing tomes that were neither read nor cared for by the masses of the people, and only added weight to the dusty shelves in the synagogues, Jacob Joseph produced books that were immediately received with wide, almost enthusiastic popularity.

II

Biography is a much neglected branch of Jewish literature. Jewish writers and thinkers are seldom caught in a reminiscent mood. They thought too little of themselves to mark the milestones of their life and work.

Hero worship is an unknown idolatry among the Jews, the great men worshiping themselves too little to leave autobiographies behind. As far as is known, Gluckel of Hameln and Solomon Maimon, the latter a contemporary of the rise of Hassidism, were the only ones vain enough to write about themselves, although Jewish history and literature have more than forgiven them for their self-flattery. This is why obscurity shrouds the heroes of Jewish history, and many of the stirring episodes of their careers are unknown to us.

Although Jacob Joseph has written four books and recorded faithfully the words and teachings of Israel Baal Shem Tob, he never speaks of himself. We are, therefore, left without a record of the life of the most volatile protagonist of the Hassidic sect.

Curiously, this flaming oracle of Hassidism and fanatic opponent of rabbis, was not only himself a rabbi but had among his forebears many whose names are household words wherever rabbinical learning is loved and honored. Yom Tob Lippman Heller, a popular commentator of the Mishnah, and Solomon Ostropoler, a Talmudist and mystic who lost his life as martyr in the Chemelnicki massacres of 1648-1658, were his not remote ancestors. From one he inherited the tradition for Talmudic scholarship, from the other he imbibed a strong leaning to esoteric wisdom, to the end that, while the Talmud formed his major occupation, he also toyed at the same time with the Lurian Kabbalah which was much in vogue in those days. While the former enlarged his mind, the latter stimulated his imagination, so that he became proficient in revealed and secret lore.

Sarograd, a small town in Volhynia, was the scene of his first ministration. Here ample opportunity to enlarge his mind was afforded him, for the community was small, off the main highway, and he could thus satisfy his appetite for study. His industry was prodigious and his powers of comprehension amazing. Wholly denying himself to

the world, he gave himself over to the service of God and the holy Torah. He spent all day in the little synagogue, wrapped in prayer-shawl and phylacteries, endlessly toiling over the books, snatching only the briefest time for his material needs, when he would again return to his studies. He trained himself to do with little sleep, and, after an hour or two at midnight, roused himself to continue his interrupted work.[2] His industry was rewarded by the fame which his scholarship gained for him, and rabbis of important communities, who respected his scholarship, conducted a learned correspondence with him.

Many other happy years would have passed over him in this way had it not been for an event which had a disturbing effect upon him, and which, in the end, changed his whole future. Stories of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob, which at this time were rumored about in Volhynia, reached also the city of Jacob Joseph. Rabbi Israel visited the town in the course of his travels, but the rabbi of Sarograd would not see him, nor would he allow his flock to be caught in the net of the Baal Shem.[3] Everything he had heard about him was at variance with what he himself had thought and taught. A strong believer in the teachings of Rabbinism, he regarded the principles of the new sect as dangerous innovations and warned his people against them. Dominated by strong emotions and convictions, Jacob Joseph proceeded against the new sect with his customary zeal and passion. He denounced it in his conversation and thundered against it from the pulpit. He soon became an outstanding leader of the opposition, and his reputation spread among his friends and foes alike.

Rabbi Israel felt himself secretly drawn to this flaming opponent of his teachings. The very unrestrained passion wherewith he proceeded against him, intrigued his curiosity, and he quietly laid plans for his capture and conversion. What an acquisition a man of such abundant

feeling and enthusiasm would be to a movement in which emotion counted for so much! The mission was a delicate one; hence the Baal Shem undertook to discharge it himself.

Early one morning he came to Sarograd. Meeting a few Jews in the marketplace, he began to relate some stories. They were not subtle discourses, but anecdotes such as they could understand. He discoursed in that simple and winning manner of his which made the listeners hang on his words. Soon other Jews passed, and hearing him speak were spellbound by his tales till, in a short while, a considerable company gathered about him. They were on their way to the synagogue for the morning prayers and had their prayer-shawls and phylacteries under their arms. The rabbi came for the morning services, but there were not enough men to join him in the prayers. He was an impetuous and quick-tempered man and felt the slight keenly. He called for the *Shamash* and sent him to the marketplace to summon the Jews to worship. Fascinated by the stories, the Shamash forgot his mission and joined the crowd. Other messengers were dispatched by the rabbi, but they, too, found the stranger's yarns too interesting to leave. When, at last, Rabbi Israel finished his last stories, he dismissed the audience and joined them in the synagogue for the morning devotions. When Rabbi Jacob Joseph demanded from the stranger an explanation for delaying the services, he answered him with a story, and then another story, till the rabbi became so interested that he forgave him his offense and invited him to his house.[4] At the home of the rabbi a long and earnest discussion is said to have followed, which ended in a strong bond of friendship between them. When Baal Shem departed, Jacob Joseph was already one of his most enthusiastic supporters. Rabbi Israel knew the value of his new pupil and was thankful for the gift. In one of his prayers, he said: "Not for the good deeds which I may have done, do I pray Thee for a portion of

the world to come, but for this 'Yossele' whom I have brought nigh unto Thee." [5]

III

Jacob Joseph may have found his God but he lost his peace. He was too enthusiastic a convert to be able to conceal his new-found faith. The change was too strong and sudden for him to be able to keep his secret. He was no coward to practice his faith behind closed doors. Although he did not preach his doctrine openly, there was no mistaking the new light which shone upon him. He shortened his hours of study and prolonged his devotional meditations. His prayers became loud and demonstrative; he swung his body and performed several kinds of ecstatic exercises. He taught his congregation to serve God in joy and gladness, and an unusual cheerfulness came over the man who was noted for his gloomy and melancholy disposition. He was also known to make mysterious visits to a neighboring community which, upon investigation, was found to be in the town of Medziboz, the home of Rabbi Israel and the center of Hassidism.

The news of the discovery was bruited about, and there was much wagging of tongues among his parishioners. The quiet little town became suddenly a boiling cauldron of excitement. Sarograd was treated to a first-class sensation. The rabbi was suspected of harboring heresies which only yesterday he was denouncing with such vehemence. They not only accused him of hypocrisy but of many other offenses as well. The shepherd betrayed the flock which he was sworn to protect. In their resentment they resolved to make him pay the penalty of his double-dealing. They subjected him to every manner of petty annoyance and persecution.[6]

The Jews, although the victims of oppression, not infrequently engaged in a little persecution themselves. These were the diversions which kept the ghetto from degenerating into a dull and monotonous place. There

was heresy-hunting in almost every Jewish community of old. Most often they were the result of such disasters as fires, droughts, epidemics, or the death of little ones. Whenever famine or disease overtook a community, the good people looked to the "ungodly" for the cause of the misfortune.

In the case of Jacob Joseph, however, the offense was clear and indisputable. The synagogue was defending itself against one who plotted its undoing. Party warfare sufficiently progressed by this time to regard Hassidism as an error that threatened to undermine the foundations of the orthodox faith. It was bad enough to be attacked from without, but here was one of Judaism's own sons who was found planning its destruction!

Jacob Joseph was publicly shamed, his income was withdrawn, his appearance in the synagogue was greeted with insults, his family was humiliated, and even the threat of personal violence was not spared him. It was a time when religion was taken seriously and the slightest deviation from the accustomed path was met with swift and terrible vengeance. The rabbi was no coward and would have borne the martyr's lot with patience and forbearance had he been convinced that his missionary zeal would bear fruit. But realizing the hopelessness of the situation, and desirous of escaping further humiliation, he fled the city and settled in Raskov, a small town in Volhynia.[7]

Here his fortunes did not improve and the story of his experience in Sarograd was repeated in every tragic detail. The Odyssey of his wanderings took him to many other places, but inexorably with the same result. After each brief respite, as soon as his affiliations with the new sect became known, he was compelled to resume his journey. Antagonism, hostility and persecution followed him everywhere. Hassidism was still in its infancy and he was made to suffer the shock of its newness.

IV

It was probably at this time that the thought of settling in the Holy Land occurred to him. Palestine occupies a unique place in the Hassidic faith. The lure of the Holy Land appeals to its devotees more strongly than to any other class of Jews. Aside from its national memories, it had for them associations of a peculiarly hallowed kind. It is the original home and cradle of the Kabbalah, where the graves of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and Isaac Luria are situated. All the early leaders of Hassidism longed to visit its sacred places and refresh themselves with its memories. It was, therefore, not only the tragic circumstances of his life, but a deep spiritual urge which made Rabbi Jacob Joseph look to Palestine for rest and peace.[8]

When his plans became known to Rabbi Israel he did everything to dissuade him. There was work for him to be done in his country and his services could not be spared. Israel fully recognized the talents of his pupil, his flaming enthusiasm, his courage and determination, and resolved to make use of him. Hassidism was a young movement which was struggling against heavy odds. Opposition from influential quarters was growing daily and the new sect needed just the kind of high-spirited leadership of which Jacob Joseph was capable. Long and earnestly Israel pleaded with him but at last he prevailed. Jacob Joseph abandoned all thought of leaving and consented to remain on the battlefield.

The rabbi was shortly afterwards flattered by a call to accept a rabbinical position in Niemerov. Although not a metropolitan community, the city was sanctified in Jewish history because of its sad and tragic memories. It is one of the martyr-cities in Poland, over which bloody persecutions had passed. The vicissitudes which had come upon it left in the city a strong inclination to mysticism. The Kabbalah found a home there, and its doctrine was held in deep reverence by the population. It was also a

community where Talmudism was not strongly entrenched; it possessed no eminent academies of learning. The city became early susceptible to Hassidism and it entertained more than a mild tolerance for its teachings.

After his stormy career, Rabbi Joseph found Niemerov a haven of rest. Here he could cultivate his tastes with unbridled freedom; here he taught the wisdom of his Master to many an enthusiastic pupil. The reputation of his learning and piety traveled far. Soon he was revered not merely as a leading scholar but as a holy man as well. The performance of miracles was ascribed to him, and Jews as well as Gentiles came for his advice and blessing.

Those were the first clear and unclouded years of his career. Jacob Joseph was grateful for the joy and peace they brought him. Although the city was small, the income was sufficient for his modest needs. While ministering to the needs of the community he did not neglect the greater love which filled his heart, and preached the faith of his Master to his flock, seeking to win for it a wider audience. He made many missionary journeys. He traveled the country to and fro, making contacts, forming groups, founding societies, writing letters to keep in touch with the towns and communities he had visited, till he became the living bond between the scattered outposts and the widening empire of Hassidism.

While he was in the midst of his labors, a vacancy in the rabbinate of Polona occurred and he was urged to accept the offer. The promotion was too flattering to be lightly rejected; for, aside from the fact that it was a much larger community than Niemerov, Polona was situated in the very heart of many surrounding Jewish centers. A man inspired with the missionary zeal longs for a larger pulpit for his doctrine, and Polona provided this opportunity. It was a city of considerable antiquity; it played a part in the Cossack uprising when 12,000 Jews found a refuge there. It had a tradition of celebrated

rabbis and of Hebrew printing presses which dated back to the seventeenth century. A thriving Jewish population made the city the hub of commerce for many neighboring communities. It was also favorably disposed to the teachings of Hassidism, and Rabbi Israel enjoyed in the town a hospitable reception in the early years of his career. From every point of view, therefore, it was essential that one of the ablest exponents of the Hassidic movement should occupy the throne of its rabbinate, and there was no man better fitted for the task than Jacob Joseph. He was eloquent, he was learned, a man gifted with a fiery tongue and a passionate heart. Placed in so strategic a position, the adjacent communities would easily fall into line. There was one other candidate for the position, a disciple of Rabbi Israel who bore the same name as the militant defender of the sect, but the Master recognized the outstanding qualities of the latter and decided in his favor. Thus he was installed in the rabbinate of Polona, which, after Medziboz and Meseritz, may be regarded as the third capital of Hassidism.

V

Many bitter disappointments disturbed the life of Jacob Joseph, but perhaps the keenest was the death of Israel Baal Shem Tob. Although there were rumors as to who the successor to his throne would be, the choice had not been made public and the sage of Polona secretly hoped that it would fall on him. Among all his rivals he was easily the most formidable competitor. He was the oldest of his teacher's pupils and the spiritual leader of a large and important community. He possessed learning and fluency of speech and pen. Dob Baer was a favorite disciple of the Master, but he lacked the physical hardihood which the condition of the times demanded. He was weak and ailing and seldom ventured any great distance from his house. The success of the movement depended upon the ability to extend its dominion to terri-

tories that had not yet become converted to its doctrine, a task for which he was clearly unfitted.

But Israel was a shrewd student of human nature. Although he felt himself strongly drawn to all his pupils, their foibles and shortcomings did not escape him. His long and intimate acquaintance with them gave him the opportunity to study their character and observe their habits. Although he greatly admired Jacob Joseph and considered him one of his greatest acquisitions, he did not feel that he possessed the necessary qualifications of a leader. He had a quick and easily provoked temper and lacked the patience and subtlety which the leadership of Hassidism needed. Many a time he had to curb the impetuosity of his high-strung pupil and check the unbridled bitterness of his attack.[9] Hassidism was at a stage of development when adherence to it had to be won with the heart and tongue of the lover rather than with the sword and violence of the soldier.

When Dob Baer succeeded to the position made vacant by the death of his teacher, Jacob Joseph found it hard to master his wounded pride. When the change of the official headquarters of Hassidism was announced he refused to visit the court of the new leader. He regarded it as a slight to the memory of the Master and probably suspected his colleague of cherishing his own ambitions. But events soon shaped themselves to bring the two men together.

If ever there was a time when high resolve and united counsel were needed, it was in the days which followed the death of Rabbi Israel. The storm of hostility, which was long in coming, broke over the heads of the Hassidim with fierce and uncontrolled fury. The excommunication of Hassidism tightened the opposition to the movement. Nothing was spared to ridicule and discredit it in the eyes of its opponents. Not only were its followers denounced as heretics and unbelievers, but every form of social, even business relations with them were forbidden. They were

charged with being despoilers of religion and corrupters of morals, and marriage with their children was likened to unions with apostates. Mob violence was incited against them, and their activities were denounced to the government as being subversive of the peace and security of the state.

Harmony within the Hassidic group itself was of the highest moment. Weakening of its ranks would have proved disastrous to the struggling sect. The fortunes of Hassidism were already seriously impaired by the death of its founder and the advancing ill health of his successor; any further disturbance might have had the effect of completing the work of destruction. Jacob Joseph was quick to realize the seriousness of the situation and, forgetting whatever secret grudge he may have been harboring, he rushed to the defense of the threatened faith. He resumed his relations with Rabbi Dob Baer by visiting his court, recording his impressions in the following characteristic manner: "After the death of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob, the *Shekhinah* moved with scrip and staff from Medziboz and chose Meseritz as its abode." [10]

VI

Although many miles separated Meseritz from Polona, there was complete harmony between the two camps. As though the campaign were planned by a master strategist, it was carried on with unusual effectiveness. While Dob Baer was recruiting and instructing the soldiers, Jacob Joseph was forging the weapons with which the attack was to be made. Books were the armaments in those days with which all the theological differences were fought. Texts and quotations were the heavy artillery that opposing camps trained on each other. An annihilating citation from some acknowledged authority was as deadly in its effect as long-range cannon are to-day. In this form of warfare, Jacob Joseph had but few equals. He could browbeat and bewilder his opponents with the extent of

his learning. He could meet their charges page by page and quotation by quotation. He could cite as learnedly and as lengthily as they, and, what was more damaging, he surpassed them in the use of invectives. He was master of a style which was peculiarly adapted for the sort of polemics then greatly in vogue, and he used it with singular effectiveness.

His first book, *Toldoth Jacob Joseph,* "The Generations of Jacob Joseph," proved tremendously popular, and was regarded by friends and foes of Hassidism as a bugle call to battle. It was glorified by the Hassidim and publicly burned by their opponents.[11] The flames heated rather than destroyed the interest the book aroused. Outwardly it was a wholly harmless book, containing discourses on the Sabbatical portions of the Torah, written in the style and phraseology of the old *Darshanim,* or "preachers," a sort of literature common enough in those days. Yet, dynamite, sufficient to blow up the whole structure of traditional orthodox Judaism, was stored in its pages. Interwoven with the simple homilies were Hassidic interpretations of the texts of the Bible, combined with a violent attack against the detractors of Israel Baal Shem Tob and the movement he had founded. The spirit of his teacher is everywhere present in its pages, and so profound is his veneration for him that he seldom trusts himself to call him by his name, but almost always speaks of him as *Mori,* "My Master." He made it possible for Hassidism to be viewed in a new light, and hearts that did not know it were awakened to its radiant truth and beauty.

He lacerated the sensibilities of the official representatives of rabbinical Judaism, exposed their "sophistry," "hypocrisy," and the superior airs they were giving themselves. He justified the mercilessness of his attack by saying that "The competent physician who loves his patients and really wants to cure them, will do so by first lancing their wounds and then proceed to heal them. The posi-

tion of the spiritual healer must be the same, if he is really interested in teaching his people the right way. He who strives to fulfill the commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' must first open the wounds created by his sins so that he may be able to receive the remedy." [12]

Jacob Joseph was the first Hassidic writer to attack the sins and abuses of his time in so fearless and unsparing a manner. "To build a new sanctuary," he said, "one must first destroy the old." With the zeal and enthusiasm of a reformer, he tears the mask from the pretended leaders of the people and exposes their sham and corruption. In his judgment, the rabbis are the principal offenders. Although he mentioned no names, they quailed under the barrage of his attack. "They hunger for material gain from their earliest youth. Under the pretense of religion and piety, they travel about visiting the country, presumably to inquire after the condition of the people, but really for the purpose of accepting gifts of money and presents that come from the sweated earnings of the masses." [13]

He ridiculed the so-called learning of the rabbis, "which is not for the sake of Heaven," but that they may show off their superior wit and wisdom. "Everyone is hungry for power and cries out, 'I want to rule, for I am the greater scholar.' " [14] "In former times," he continued, "when men engaged in piety and learning for their own sake, and not for the sake of the honors and rewards they brought, the scholar would seek out the company of the uneducated and conduct himself with modesty and humility, so as to draw them nearer to the Father in Heaven, but not so in this generation, when there is no bond of feeling and unity with their less cultivated brethren." [15]

Jacob Joseph severely castigated the homiletical methods of the rabbis, who aim more, he said, to exhibit their learning and erudition than to instruct the plain and

simple-hearted people. "Since the preaching epidemic has spread among the rabbis," he writes, "they make it their custom to display the subtleties of their learning and their hair-splitting casuistries on the Sabbath before Passover and the Sabbath of Repentance, instead of sanctifying the people for the service of the Holy One, blessed be He." [16]

Few were the abuses of his time which did not come under the lash of his stinging pen. The cantors, no less than the rabbis, were included in his critical review. "These appointed representatives of the synagogue," he complained, "whose duty it is to interpret the meaning of the prayers, waste their time by singing, and thereby interrupt the services, giving the people an opportunity for all kinds of meaningless twaddle and gossip." [17]

The *Heder* and its system of education had few severer critics than Jacob Joseph. He censured the incompetence of the teachers, whom he accused of maintaining their positions by flattering the parents of their children rather than by their ability to teach. "The teachers," he said, "find it more profitable to flatter and amuse the parents than teach their young," [18] and concluded his strictures by observing that, both the leaders and the spirit of the age have earned an equal share of blame for the religious degeneracy of the times.

That such a book should have created wide resentment among the rabbis was to be expected. They were stunned by the power of its attack. No other man had been so daring and defiant as Rabbi Jacob Joseph, and they never forgave him for the wounds to their self-esteem. Feeble attempts were made to answer him, but they lacked the force and directness of his attack. Efforts were made to have the book withdrawn from circulation, but its message had already spread beyond reach. Jacob Joseph was a prodigious writer. He published three other books, *Porath Joseph,* "Offering of the Fruitful Vine"; *Kessonath Passim,* "A Coat of Many Colors"; and *Zophnath*

Pa'aneah, "Revealer of Secrets," but they lacked the fire of his first attempt. The initial literary productions of Hassidism appeared in Medziboz, intended, no doubt, as a tribute to the memory of the founder of the movement who inspired their pages. The foundations for a literature, unique of its kind, and which, as time went on, became much more extensive, were thus laid.

VII

Jacob Joseph was greater as a controversialist than as an original thinker, as a polemicist than as a philosopher. While he defended Hassidism, he added little to its teachings. He was an expositor rather than an innovator; an historian rather than a blazer of new trails. A fighter all his life, he lacked the time to contemplate the revelation he received from his Master in order to produce it in a new form. Almost all his teachings are old, some elementary; what is new, is his own encounter with them. He does not venture far beyond his teacher in his statement of the metaphysics of Hassidism, but records faithfully what he received from his lips. He speaks of Rabbi Israel with the deepest veneration, almost approaching worship, and never allows himself to subject his words to the test of criticism. Yet he is unique for the warmth wherewith he states the doctrines of the new faith. To him more than to any other Hassidic leader we are indebted for almost all we know of the personality and teachings of Israel Baal Shem Tob. Whereas Dob Baer seldom mentions his teacher and never quotes his words, the spirit and message of Rabbi Israel hover over all the works of Jacob Joseph.

He had an overpowering consciousness of God. He saw and felt Him in all things. Pantheism has never had a more enthusiastic exponent than Jacob Joseph. He identified God with nature. God is not only the creative impulse of the world, but also its vitalizing and energizing power. There is nothing that is outside of God, and

whatever is, exists because of Him. Nature is the external covering which conceals the inner essence of the Deity. Appearance and illusion are the masks behind which God hides. Matter is the form of which the soul is the substance; nature is the garment of which God is the essence.[19] What gives man his uniqueness and superiority is not his visible form but his invisible spirit. Even the words of the Torah and its precepts and commandments are but the veils and coverings that conceal an inner soul without which they are but lifeless forms.[20] There is a soul residing in all things without which nothing could exist. Man must, therefore, learn to serve God with all his faculties, material as well as spiritual, for even the pleasures and appetites of the senses, when refined and purified, may be made to become "limbs of the *Shekhinah*."

Prayer is the lifting of the veil which discloses the Living Glory; but that it might exert this influence, it must be devout, rapturous, ecstatic. Jacob Joseph followed his teacher's ideal of prayer; but he went even beyond him in demanding that the prayers must be fresh, original and spontaneous to be effective. *Kavanah* meant to him the contemplation of the spiritual meaning of the letters and words of the prayers and the clothing of them with new meaning. Stirring prayer fills the same words with fresh meaning, as the lover finds always something new in the object of his affections.

After demolishing the position of the traditional rabbi, Jacob Joseph presents his ideal of the Zaddik. He makes the Zaddik the capstone of Hassidism, the soul of the universe, and the source and fountain of all spiritual influence. He is the driving power, the motivating force, which keeps all life going. The masses are the body of which the Zaddik is the soul; they are the tree of which he is the fruit; they are the matter of which he is the form and essence. He is the channel through which flows all that is true and beautiful in the world. Like Moses,

the Zaddik is the mediator between God and the world. The Hassid must have faith in the Zaddik and never waver in his loyalty and devotion to him even when he fails to comprehend his ways. It may sometimes appear as though the Zaddik had yielded to the frailties of the flesh and descended from his high level, but this is only an illusion and a deception of the senses, for, in reality, the Zaddik can no more err than God Himself. The Zaddik may sometimes find it necessary to shed the true essence of his being and assume material form, as the king assumes the peasant's garb so that his subjects should not be afraid to approach him. But such change is only temporary, for, as though on angel's wings, he soon raises himself again to the spiritual heights where he properly belongs.

There must exist a relationship of love between the Zaddik and his people; it is only by such a feeling between them that they can prove helpful to one another. The Zaddik must experience a love and yearning for his people. He must be near them always, and enter intimately into their lives. Although it is within the province of the Zaddik to confer material blessings upon the Hassidim, it is not for these gifts that they are to seek him; his greatest purpose is to awaken in them a sense and feeling for God. Since the Zaddik is wholly spiritual, and the material ways of life are strange and foreign to him, it is the duty of his followers to provide amply for his needs and comforts. They must share their substance with him and support him with their gifts. They must lift from him the material burden of life so that, undisturbed by worldly cares, he may surrender himself to the service of God.

VIII

Rancor and embitterment marked the closing days of Rabbi Jacob Joseph. He who was unsparing in his criticism of his opponents could not expect any better treat-

ment at their hands. The ill feeling, aroused by his campaign, drew corresponding fire from the other camp. He was denounced as a heretic from many pulpits, and the severest penalty that could be imposed upon an author whose views did not square with the prevailing theological opinions, was visited upon him. As had already happened in a number of Jewish communities, such as Wilna, Brodi and Prague, his books were consigned to the flames. It was a stupid method of silencing an enemy, one which the synagogue had learned from the church.

In heaven, tells Hassidic legend, the vengeance of the rabbis stirred up deep commotion. A venerated Zaddik, Rabbi Herschel of Zlotzov, cried out his protest before the Highest Court: "Is it not known to Him who created the world, that not for his own honor, God forbid, has Rabbi Jacob Joseph written these books, but only for the honor of God and his holy Torah?" Jacob Joseph himself appeared and demanded that his works be searched for any fault or blemish that would justify the persecution to which they were subjected. His request was granted. When every word and letter of his books was examined and no wrong was discovered, the decree went forth from Heaven: "Every man who agitates against his books will end in the denial of the God of Israel, and every community which countenances their burning will be destroyed." [21]

When he found that, because of the hostility against him, the sale of his books had materially fallen off, Jacob Joseph undertook their distribution by personally offering them for sale in the villages and communities. The itinerant book-seller was a well-known institution in those days; the doors of homes as well as community houses, such as synagogues and schools of learning, were open to bid him welcome. But no such favorable reception was accorded to the man who encountered the ill will of the synagogue and its official representatives.

That was the sort of experience Jacob Joseph met in

the city of Berditchev where he came to dispose of his sacred wares. After staying there for some time with no one turning up to buy his books, he grew exceedingly angry and expressed himself in harsh terms against the town and its inhabitants. His complaint was loud and bitter, piercing the very heavens, and the decree of the destruction of the city would have been proclaimed, were it not for Rabbi Wolf of Zhitomir, who hastened to the offended rabbi and pleaded with him: "Are you any better than the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is said that He offered His Torah to all the nations of the earth and they refused to accept it, and still He did not visit destruction upon the world?" [22]

Rabbi Jacob Joseph died in the year 1782, without even as much as guessing the victory that his books helped to score for Hassidism. Widely read during his life, they continued as an effective weapon against the opponents of Hassidism for many years to come, with quite an extensive reading public to this day. Although the writer was dead, the campaign against his books went on unabated, for he left a legacy which survived his death.

Yet persecution failed to check the enthusiasm and interest they aroused. A fighter all his life, Jacob Joseph may be said to have died sword in hand. He created for himself a place in the history of Hassidism which is unique and important. He stood at the birth of the movement and contributed to its maturity and development. He lacked the poetic genius of Rabbi Israel, and the patient, organizing faculty of Dob Baer; but he supplied the enthusiasm that made Hassidism a burning conviction in the hearts of thousands. Above all, he was the first literary master of Hassidism who proclaimed its independence and established for it a permanent place in the spiritual life of the Jewish people.

Chapter VII

A GENTLE HASSID

To the mysteries of life and death must be added the mystery of human character. Though without crown or scepter it has been proclaimed undisputed monarch of the universe. In a rivalry between mind and heart mind comes out a poor second. The springs of life lie not in talent but in character. Genius is soon forgotten but great hearts live forever. Long ago has the Good Book said, "Out of the heart are the issues of life."

Nature did not endow Rabbi Levi Yitzhok with many talents. He was not a seer like Rabbi Israel, a thinker like Sheneir Zalman, a poet like Nahman Bratzlav; he also lacked the organizing faculty of Dob Baer. In one respect, however, he stood alone, unequalled by any of the Hassidic leaders of his time, indeed, all time; this was his deep and burning love for his people Israel, a love that knew no end or limit. For this gift alone the world has rewarded him with its acclaim and handed down his name to posterity as one of the holiest of men.

Much that Hassidism has taught and wrought met with criticism and invited opposition, but no word of censure has ever been passed against Rabbi Levi Yitzhok. He is admired by the friends and foes of the movement alike, and the world remembers him as one of the eminent legendary figures. Not since Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob has there been a man whose life so easily and naturally lent itself to many sorts of fables and stories as his. As though he had no earthly existence at all, he steps out like a myth from the remote past. Many of the early triumphs of Hassidism have passed, its original fire has

died down, but the almost unbelievable simplicity of the life of Levi Yitzhok Berditchev and his tender, almost fanatic, love of his people will remain one of the abiding and never-to-be-forgotten gifts of this rapidly disappearing sect.

Great and lasting love is rare; even the most enamored eyes do not remain blind to the imperfections of the one they love. In a life-long attachment enthusiasm often loses its glamour. But not so was the love of Levi Yitzhok for his people Israel, the bride of his youth and old age. Levi Yitzhok loved God and loved Judaism, but his love of the Jews surpassed his love of both. Had he to choose between God and Israel, impossible as the thought is, he would unquestionably have chosen the latter. He loved God with a deep and passionate love, but only because He is the God of Israel. He would not allow a harsh or evil word to be whispered about the Jews, and severely rebuked those preachers who dared find fault with them. Never have such tender and endearing words been heard from any man as when Levi Yitzhok contemplated his people Israel. All his life was devoted to their service; they filled his heart; they occupied his mind; they were the object of his profoundest care and anxiety. For their sake he often "quarrelled" and wrestled with God, and addressed to Him words, which, in the mouth of another, would have been considered rank blasphemy. Rabbi Levi Yitzhok suffered much in his life, but it was not his personal sorrows that weighed him down but the afflictions of his people in exile. Much as he believed in God, in His wisdom and justice, He could never justify Himself in Rabbi Levi Yitzhok's eyes. God always appeared "guilty" to the rabbi of Berditchev, and he did not hesitate to tell Him so in language which was frank and bold. The Prophets castigated the sins of Israel, and the rabbis of the Talmud were often unflattering in their censure, but Levi Yitzhok was aware of no faults and would not tolerate any evil reports about them. When

sorrows and misfortunes befell the Jews, he not only prayed to God to remove them, but actually "threatened" Him, saying that should he fail to do so, he and the other Zaddikim would not obey His commands. "Defender of Israel" is the name by which his generation called him; that reputation has clung to him to this very day. There were Defenders of Israel, according to a Jewish tradition, in every age, but never has there been a man who pleaded the cause of the Jewish people with such ardent and consummate love as Levi Yitzhok Berditchev.

II

Levi Yitzhok was born in an atmosphere which was congenial to his nature. Though there was little wealth in his family, there existed a tradition for learning which is said to have extended over twenty-six generations. His father, Meir, who was himself a rabbi, was a scion of learned forebears, as was also his mother, Deborah. She, however, enjoyed no small reputation for piety and benevolence on her own account. On his father's and mother's sides there had been for generations a fine blending of Rabbinism and mysticism which Levi Yitzhok imbibed in his earliest youth. When, therefore, he was born in 1740, he came into Hassidism by the right of birth rather than by inner, personal struggle.[1]

From his early boyhood he was marked for that quiet and meditative nature that characterized all the years of his subsequent life. He was one of those men who had never had a childhood, but always retained something of his childhood with him. His burning love of knowledge, his passion for truth and righteousness and his enthusiasm exhibited themselves at an early age, for Levi Yitzhok was not only a conscientious student, but almost wore himself out at his books. Extreme tenseness characterized everything he did, whether it was in his studies at home or in his prayers at the synagogue.

As might have been expected, Levi Yitzhok spent most

of his time in study, first under his father, then under other tutors. His intellectual powers were keen; he comprehended extraordinarily all that was taught him, making himself master of the Talmud, together with all its multitudinous commentaries. Yet, he did not neglect the meditative and contemplative life, for he read extensively the *Mussar,* or ethico-religious works, which enjoin personal discipline. It is thus that at an early age he became an adept in the two branches of Jewish study, the intellectual and moral, the mental and the spiritual. While the one sharpened his mind, the other softened his heart; the former taught him what to believe, the latter how to live.

Levi Yitzhok arrived at an age when marriage had to be considered. The eyes of many maidens' well-to-do fathers were upon him, for he was by all odds a youth worthy of the best man's daughter. He had many things in his favor: learning, noble ancestry, and the prospects of a brilliant rabbinical future. It did not matter that years would yet have to pass before the student ripened into a scholar and the scholar into a rabbi, for, to what end had God conferred substance upon the parents of Jewish daughters if not to nurture the seed that would one day grow into a rich harvest?

A wealthy merchant, Israel Perez of Lubartov, was the successful winner of the prize; and, after Levi Yitzhok was duly and solemnly wedded to his daughter, he went to live with his parents-in-law. Marriage produced little change in the inner or outer life of the young man, for he continued to study the same books and follow the same interests as before. His material needs amply provided for by his wife's parents, he devoted himself to his books with still greater zeal and enthusiasm than before, till, in a short time, he attained to considerable standing in scholarship.

It was not until he came to the attention of Rabbi Samuel Hurewitz of Riczivol that Levi Yitzhok's life

may be said to have taken a new turn. Rabbi Samuel, a Talmudist and Kabbalist of high standing, had the reputation for paving a new way in the study of the Torah and attracted a large following in the learned circles of the neighboring villages. While not openly preaching Hassidism, he fell under the influence of the Preacher of Meseritz and became one of his enthusiastic disciples. He applied the Hassidic method to his public discourses, interpreting the teachings of the Torah in its light. While Levi Yitzhok was no seeker after religious novelties, he was intrigued by what he had heard of Rabbi Samuel and resolved to visit him.

It was not uncommon for students of the Torah to "exile" themselves to distant places in order to sit at the feet of noted masters of the Law. It was a practice often indulged in and must have existed for a long time for the Mishnah speaks of it in strong terms of commendation.[2] The mind of the Jewish student was in this way kept fresh and sharp, since it was not permitted to become dulled by following one method of instruction alone.

When his father-in-law heard of Levi Yitzhok's intentions, he refused to let him go. His business had dwindled and he was anxious about his daughter's future. It was not part of his plan that his son-in-law should remain forever a student and dependent upon him for support. His ambition was to see him installed as a rabbi, his daughter sharing her husband's honors. Levi Yitzhok, kind, gentle and easily swayed, would not permit himself to be deterred from his purpose. Sensing that his father-in-law could be persuaded in no other way, he entered on a hunger-strike, rejecting for several days every offer of food. It was a harsh method for softening the heart of his stubborn father-in-law. At any rate, it was the first of its kind employed for such a purpose, but it proved effective; for, before long, Levi Yitzhok departed on his journey with his family's blessings.

III

The Kabbalah was his major study at the home of the new master and the effect it had upon him was transforming. He felt like one emerging from a shaded thicket into a sun-bathed clearing. There was a mystical affinity between the Kabbalah and Levi Yitzhok's own sensitive and poetic nature. He was fascinated by what he learned, and his imagination drew even more flattering pictures than what he had actually beheld. New light broke in upon many of the books he was studying, and their harsh pages were softened by the calm and gentle influence of the Kabbalah.

It was also at the home of Rabbi Samuel that he heard for the first time of the famed Preacher of Meseritz, Dob Baer, and was moved by the reports of his piety and saintliness, by the splendor of his court and by the great number of disciples who surrounded him. The poverty and wretchedness of the life of his people contrasted sharply with the rumored glamour of the palace of the Hassidic saint. Spending all his years in small and woebegone communities, he could not believe that there was such splendor left in Israel. It was but natural that he should want to feast his eyes on the glories of which he had been told and visit the master who was acclaimed by thousands.

Not many miles separate Meseritz from Husakov, but to Levi Yitzhok the two towns represented two different worlds. One was cold, prosaic, ordinary, filled with commonplace men and women; the other was tense and warm, with a feeling of fervor and excitement in the air. In one place trade and business was the topic of conversation; in the other, one heard of God, angels and the Messiah. He was overawed by the very presence of the Master of Meseritz and the tense religious atmosphere that prevailed in his court. He regarded him with a feeling of reverence little short of divine. He barely trusted

himself to look into the face of his new teacher, and he wrote down in a diary every stray word that fell from his lips. He found the deepest wisdom in his every utterance, and mystery in the very movements of his body.

No worshiper ever regarded his Buddha with greater veneration than Levy Yitzhok felt in the presence of Rabbi Dob Baer. It chanced on Rosh Hashanah, he writes, when "I saw a halo around his head. I grew afraid, and trembled all over. Some people who were with me but did not understand the reason of my agitation, took hold of me that I should not fall. But the Master, who saw what was happening, turned his face to the wall, and leaned against it for some time. When he looked about again, there was nothing around his head. There was a second time when I saw a halo about his head, and that was at the hour of his death. Then it was granted to me to understand his doctrine." [3]

IV

For some time, Rabbi Levi Yitzhok lived in the glorified atmosphere of his teacher. His naturally emotional temperament was stimulated a thousandfold by the tension of his surroundings. He endowed his master with almost divine qualities and imagined the very air of his house to be filled with spirits. Much as he had learned before, he regarded himself as ignorant and studied under the supervision of Rabbi Dob Baer everything from the beginning.

But the dreamland in which he was living did not last long; the awakening was rude and sudden. For, while he was spending his time in a state of religious transport his family was living in need and destitution. The material circumstances of his family, never too flourishing, were now in a state of positive collapse. Letters from home had a sobering effect upon him, and he began to cast his eyes about for a rabbinical position. But, little demandful as congregations were in those days, Levi Yitzhok

could not meet even the modest requirements that were made, for in worldly things he was as impractical and inexperienced as a child.

A vacancy in the rabbinate of Riczival, a position which was formerly held by his teacher Samuel Hurewitz, gave Levi Yitzhok his opportunity and he accepted the call. Flattering as it must have been to be called to occupy the place of his erstwhile master, the position proved much more difficult than he had thought; lacking the former occupant's tact and experience, he soon got himself into greater trouble than he could overcome. Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was not the sort of man to hide his convictions; flaunting his affiliations with the Hassidic sect he brought down upon himself the displeasure of the community. A period of persecution followed in which many of his townspeople offered him affront repeatedly. Unwilling to remain the cause of friction in his community, he left Riczival.

V

In olden times, cities often derived their reputations from the rabbis who presided over them. It was neither size nor wealth that made them noted but the presence of some celebrated scholar. A high Talmudic authority, or a school of learning, was regarded as a greater asset to a community than facilities for trade and commerce. It was thus that small communities often became better known than many a thriving Jewish metropolis.

Pinsk has for a long time been one of the best known Jewish centers in the Russian pale of settlement, not because of its wealth and population, but because of the place it occupied in learned Jewish circles. A city of considerable antiquity, it had many material and spiritual advantages in its favor. It was one of the largest industrial centers in northwestern Russia, and its trading facilities attracted thousands of Jews from the neighboring towns. It was also famous for Jewish learning, a city

of saints and scholars, with rabbis known the world over. To be appointed to the spiritual leadership of Pinsk was an honor to make even the elect envious.

Under the very shadow of Pinsk lay Karlin, a suburban community with no particular individuality of its own. Its people regarded themselves as part of the mother city. Nevertheless it deserves special mention because of Rabbi Aaron, one of the early Hassidic leaders who lived there. In the history of Hassidism, Karlin occupies a place of no small importance; for there was a time when it promised to overshadow both Medziboz and Meseritz and give its name to the Hassidic movement. To their opponents, the Hassidim were for a long time known as "Karliners," or, followers of Rabbi Aaron of Karlin.

Aaron was a strange and peculiar character, in many respects not unlike Rabbi Levi Yitzhok. A man capable of deep emotion and enthusiasm, it was said of him that when he recited the "Song of Songs" of King Solomon there was a veritable commotion in heaven. But he was also a practical missionary of no ordinary caliber. It was chiefly due to his influence that Karlin became the center of a Hassidic propaganda that spread its influence over many neighboring communities. Although living in Karlin, his activities were not without their influence in Pinsk, and it was due to his work that Hassidism made inroads in this important Jewish center.[4]

When a vacancy in one of the minor rabbinical positions in Pinsk occurred Hassidism had already been sufficiently advanced in the city to secure the appointment of Levi Yitzhok, though, no doubt, not without the influence of Rabbi Aaron of Karlin. It was a victory for Levi Yitzhok, but a still greater advantage to the cause of the movement he represented. To drive a wedge into so large and important a town as Pinsk was no small gain for the sect that had all these years been struggling for recognition. Aside from its size and population, the

reputation of the city was acknowledged in the Jewish world. With Pinsk as a base, Hassidism would be enabled to carry on its activities in many of the smaller communities surrounding it. From every point of view, therefore, the election of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was an achievement of which Hassidism could be proud.

It was not a thornless bed of roses to which Levi Yitzhok had been called. To a man of his mild and gentle nature, the storm of opposition created by his election was more than he could bear. The enemies of Hassidism were aware of the victory of their opponents and their response was swift and sure. After a year of smoldering antagonism, hostilities broke out against the recently appointed spiritual leader in full force. It was at the time (1772) when the air of the ghetto was filled with rumors of Rabbi Elijah's proclamation against Hassidism. Jewish communities in Russia and Poland were called upon to give the document the widest publicity by having it read in the synagogues at solemn assemblies. Faithful followers of traditional orthodoxy were urged to spare no means of stamping out this sectarian heresy. Persecution and oppression were preached openly against the Hassidim, and the appeal did not fall upon deaf ears.

The news of the Gaon's ban created the wildest agitation; there was tumult and excitement in almost every town and hamlet. The Jews were divided into two antagonistic camps, not equal in strength or numbers, but equal in the passion of their aroused feelings. The partisans on both sides were unsparing in their charges and accusations against each other, in many instances the hostilities ending in violence. Even those who were not quite clear about the theological difference of the opposing groups joined in the general fray. Pinsk would not allow itself to be outdone by other cities in its zeal for God and the Torah and plunged into the struggle with the enthusiasm of fighting for a holy cause. Some combatants added their personal interests to the cause of the offended faith, and

the result was that, in less than a year after Rabbi Levi Yitzhok's arrival, the city was a seething cauldron of strife and excitement.

Levi Yitzhok felt the hurt deeply. Although it was around the cause he represented rather than against him personally that the fight was raging, he could not overlook his wounded pride. Of a peaceful and tranquil disposition, he stood helpless in the face of the storm that his presence aroused. He was not without his supporters, but they could not prevail against the more powerful and influential members of the community. Finally, in order to obviate the threatened rift in the Jewish community, he left the city and settled in a smaller near-by town. His change of residence did little to improve his fortunes, for the cause of his persecution in Pinsk followed him also to his new home. A second ban against Hassidism, couched in even more bitter and uncompromising terms than the first which had just been published, added fuel to the already raging fire, to the end that this kind and gentle teacher found himself tormented and hounded by the very people he loved with such a deep and tender love. The quiet and meditative life which he longed for was denied him; instead he found himself beset with difficulties which he was not responsible in arousing.

VI

Levi Yitzhok was fast approaching middle age with prospects which were far from encouraging. Although his lot—as life in the Jewish ghetto went in those days—was by no means unique, it was at least unusual. Here was a man with beautiful ideals of nobility and simplicity graven on his heart, a whole life dominated by a passion of love and tenderness to all men, unaccustomed to bitterness, incapable of hatred, yet, in the end, driven from place to place like an outcast. His espousal of Hassidism had thus far brought him nothing but suffering; not even that inner spiritual peace for which his soul thirsted. His

heart was weary within him because of the strife and controversy in which he became entangled. He had neither the militant aggressiveness of the fighter nor the patient resignation of the martyr. He was not used to the exciting life of the world but yearned for the tranquil and meditative life of the student and teacher. The sorrows that befell him and the fugitive experience he had been compelled to endure unnerved rather than steeled his powers of resistance. When, therefore, at the age of forty-five, he found himself surrounded by fresh sorrows and difficulties, an unhealthy brooding threatened to settle over his otherwise optimistic nature.

It was at this time, while Levi Yitzhok was contemplating his life, that a new hope dawned upon him, for he received an invitation to accept the vacant spiritual leadership of Berditchev, a position which might have flattered much older and better known rabbis than himself.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhok and Berditchev were so well suited to each other that they became almost identical. Celebrated among Jews as the "Jerusalem of Volhynia," Berditchev prided itself on a Jewish community which was probably four hundred years old. If the city did not possess the intellectual advantages of Wilna, celebrated as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," it did not, on the other hand, inherit the latter's prejudices against any other approach to Judaism except that of the Talmud. If it did not possess great schools of learning, or produce a Rabbi Elijah Gaon, it cultivated a mild tolerance of the mystical teachings which went by the name of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. Although strong in its loyalty to the orthodox faith, Berditchev was more than benevolently disposed to the teachings of Hassidism from the very beginning.[5] Although the *Kahal,* or community-organization, was officially antagonistic to Hassidism, it was forced to treat the new movement tactfully, since a large number of its membership were well disposed toward it.

There was a cosmopolitan atmosphere in Berditchev

which contributed to its tolerant spirit. Although not one of the largest towns in the Russian Jewish settlement, Berditchev was of no small commercial and industrial importance since the trade of all the surrounding towns and villages flowed to its markets. It was also a city where three religions and types of culture met and lived together. In addition to its Jewish element, the city had also an established Polish population, besides a considerable number of Russians. The relations between the Jews and the Poles were superficially friendly, as both stood in fear of the Russians, their common oppressors.

VII

Rabbi Levi Yitzhok's honeymoon in Berditchev was not without friction, as is sometimes true of honeymoons. The part of the community that was hostile to Hassidism resented the coming of so enthusiastic a leader. So far Hassidism had only been mildly tolerated by them; now it was on its way to becoming a group movement of considerable strength and influence. Running true to form, there were the usual disputes and clashes, not infrequently conducted with heat and bitterness.

It did not take Rabbi Levi Yitzhok long to overcome the opposition. A gentle teacher, without the least trace of aggressiveness, he disarmed his opponents not by force but by the kindness and tenderness of his nature. Before many years passed, his enemies grew to love and respect him. The simplicity and sincerity of his life, his heart overflowing with love for all groups and classes of Jews alike, no matter to which party they belonged, and, above all, his infectious enthusiasm, won for him the admiration and good will of all men. The stormy career of the Gentle Hassid was thus ended, and a rainbow of peace arched over a life that had been beset with many hardships and difficulties.

In the congenial atmosphere of Berditchev the qualities of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok matured and developed; they

were not of mind, but heart. He carried himself with a grace that earned for him the sobriquet the "Rabbi of Berditchev." If he did not practice the artifices of the Zeddik, he was certainly the most perfect ideal the founder of Hassidism had in mind when he created his image. The milk of human kindness flowed in him abundantly. He stretched forth his hands to mankind with a pure gesture, and none strove for the happiness of all men more earnestly than this gentle soul. The blessings he bestowed were meant for all men under all conditions and circumstances. Having suffered much himself, he was tolerant toward all, even those who differed with his doctrine. No man was a stranger to the kingdom of his heart, not even such as had strayed from the path of Judaism. An optimist in all things, he had faith in the capacity for goodness of all people.

VIII

With the exception of Rabbi Israel, Levi Yitzhok was the most democratic of all Hassidic leaders. The meek, the poor, the humble, the disinherited, were not only part of his life, but his *whole* life. Whereas many rabbis were given to flattering the rich and influential members of their congregations while treating the poor members of their flocks with indifference, and even contempt, Levi Yitzhok was overflowing with love and tenderness to the least considered Jew in the community and would often delay the synagogue services so that "Beril the tailor," who was detained in his shop, might not miss the prayers.[6]

His association with the village Jews, his frequent visits to the rural communities, his acquaintance with the simplicity and unaffectedness of their lives, their deep, though often untrained piety, made him particularly solicitous of their lot. Good and pious Jews though they were, their spiritual life was on a low level, sometimes not superior to that of the Christian peasants among

whom they lived. Without regular synagogues, they performed their religious devotions privately, coming to Berditchev only for the great Holy Days. The townspeople regarded them with scorn, and assigned them to the humblest places in the synagogue. But Rabbi Levi Yitzhok sought them out and treated them with every mark of kindness and consideration.

It happened on *Rosh Hashanah* "New Year," as Rabbi Levi Yitzhok was about to blow the *Shofar* "ram's horn," as he was accustomed to do, he suddenly hesitated. The pause became embarrassing to the congregation. When, after the services, he was asked the reason for the delay, he said that he had noticed a Jew standing in the rear of the synagogue who was muttering to himself. He was a village Jew whose soul was filled with love for his Creator, but, not having learned to pray, his heart was sad and heavy because he could not join the congregation in the chanting of the prayer that precedes the blowing of the Shofar. In his distress, the man addressed God in the following words: "O great God, I am an ignorant man, and have not learned to serve thee as I should; I cannot even recite the holy prayers from the book. But I know the letters of the alphabet of the holy tongue. I shall, therefore, repeat these letters all day long, and Thou, who canst make up prayers even more beautiful than those which are in the prayer-book, wilt weave them into songs that will be acceptable unto thee." And it was for this man that Rabbi Levi Yitzhok had waited.[7]

Rabbi Levi Yitzhok loved children with the tender devotion that caused him often to rebuke their parents for rushing to the synagogue for the discharge of their religious devotion with a consequent neglect of their little ones. An anecdote which is told by him illustrates the kindness of his heart.

It was on the eve of the Day of Atonement when the congregation was assembled in the synagogue for the chanting of *Kol Nidre,* the most solemn portion of the

evening services. Already some time before sunset the good people of Berditchev were gathered in the House of God. A vast throng was standing clad in white robes, with their prayer-shawls thrown over their heads, awaiting the arrival of their beloved rabbi, who, unlike his usual custom, was late.

The sun had almost set; the shadows were gathering; dusk had fallen, but Levi Yitzhok had not put in his appearance. The congregation became impatient, anxious, fearful, not daring to utter their misgivings to one another.

It was growing darker; the time for Kol Nidre had long passed; in neighboring synagogues the services were half over. Fear seized the assembly. Who could tell what trick the Adversary might have played upon their gentle sage? Messengers were dispatched to his house, but they brought back the report that the rabbi had long since departed for the prayer-house.

Unnerved, the worshipers left the synagogue to scatter through the streets and alleys of the town trying to find their missing rabbi. They had nearly despaired of finding him when he was suddenly discovered in one of the hovels bending over an infant who had been left crying in his cradle by his parents when they had rushed off to the synagogue.[8]

The meekness and humility, the patience wherewith he bore the insults of his enemies gave rise to anecdotes of which the following is characteristic: While he was walking to the synagogue, the wife of one of his sharpest opponents emptied a pail of dirty water upon his head. His friends were outraged by the offense, and would have had her punished, but Levi Yitzhok forgave her, remarking, "How can I feel offended when a woman is carrying out the precepts of the rabbis which bid a wife obey the will of her husband?" [9]

On another occasion, his wife and family were cruelly offended by members of the party which was antagonistic

to his Hassidic teachings. The leaders of the community summoned the culprits to appear before them. After the matter had been discussed and sentence was about to be pronounced, the gentle rabbi was discovered in a corner praying to God that he might forgive those who had wronged him and his household.[10]

The rabbi of Berditchev issued an order to his community that on no account should he be disturbed in his study of the Torah, except when a new *Takanah,* or "community ordinance," was contemplated, when he desired to be present and take part in the proceedings.

One day he was called to a meeting at which the passing of a new regulation affecting the city was to be discussed. On his arrival he inquired as to the nature of the business for which he had been summoned. He was told that in view of the many strange beggars who infested the city and became a burden to the community charity-chest, they were about to adopt a measure that would forbid the poor Jews of other cities from imposing upon the good people of Berditchev. The rabbi became wroth and remarked angrily: "This is not a new Takanah for which you have called me, for it is as old as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed for just such a measure as you are contemplating passing." With this he left the meeting much to the embarrassment of the people.[11]

IX

But it is as Defender of Israel that Rabbi Levi Yitzhok became chiefly known. His love of the Jews was no pose, no empty gesture, but glowed from the very nature and essence of his being. It was a pure, holy and exalted love which, like the love of a father for his offspring, is blind to their imperfections and shortcomings. It was also a native and tender emotion which saw virtue in their failings and beauty in their ugliness. "All the worlds above and below," he said, "were created for Israel."

Israel was to him the chosen of God, the center and purpose of the universe. The election of Israel was no act of grace, no favoritism on the part of the Deity, but was due to the hereditary virtues and tendencies of heart and mind, which equipped the Jews for their high calling.

Israel is a people of sorrows, but their suffering is because of God, not due to any fault of their own. "Nay, for Thy sake are we killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for slaughter." And because it was for God that Israel had immolated themselves, Levi Yitzhok did not despair. The fortunes of God and Israel are so inseparably connected with one another that what affects one affects the other as well. "It is not Israel alone," he says, "who are in Galuth, but also the Shekhinah." The rabbi of Berditchev was, therefore, hopeful. Not even the worst calamities that have befallen the Jewish people could shatter his faith in their ultimate triumph. Prophetically he looks forward to the time when the Evil One will be conquered, sin will disappear, and the threefold redemption of Israel, God, and the Holy Land will come about.[12]

Faith in Israel—that was to him the beginning of the *Geulah,* or redemption. There had not been a man who had had such a stubborn belief in the innocence and perfection of the Jews, a belief that did not waver, even when the evidence was strongly against them. Several anecdotes illustrating his faith are told. The following are typical.

His coachman oiled the wheels of his wagon while he was engaged in prayer, which is forbidden by the Law. Instead of reprimanding him, Levi Yitzhok raised his eyes to heaven and exclaimed ecstatically, "What a great and holy people the Jews are! They will not be denied the joy of serving God even when performing such a common and menial service."[13]

When it was brought to the rabbi's attention that a member of his community had been guilty of breaking

the fast of the Ninth of Ab, he gently approached him, and said:

"My son, thou must have forgotten that this is a fast-day."

"No," answered the culprit, "I have not forgotten."

"Then, surely," continued the rabbi, "it must be the state of thy health which compelled thee to act contrary to the precepts of the Torah, in which case thou hast acted well."

"No," answered again the obstinate sinner, "my health is quite in good condition."

But Levi Yitzhok was not downcast, and, instead of scolding the unregenerate and pointing out to him the error of his way, he burst out enthusiastically, "What a truthful people the Jews are! This man might have committed the sin of falsehood and justified his action on the ground of ill health and other such excuses; but he would rather confess his sin than be guilty of an untruth." [14]

Sometimes the rabbi would proceed to test the piety of the Jews to find out for himself their faith in God. Thus, one early morning, before the stir and bustle of the day began, Levi Yitzhok was seen hurrying to the marketplace with a bottle of brandy and other refreshments in his hands. He found the Jewish and Gentile farmers who had brought their merchandise to the city sleeping on their wagons. He approached a Gentile peasant, roused him, and offered him a drink of brandy from the bottle. The sleepy rustic, only too glad to avail himself of the opportunity, gulped down the contents of the glass and dozed off again. When he tried the same thing with the Jew, he first looked around for water, washed his hands and pronounced a blessing, after which he accepted what was offered him. When Rabbi Yitzhok saw what had happened, he was filled with joy and thanked God for the piety of the Jews and their obedience to the Torah.[15]

The Sabbath had a special place in his emotional life.

All week long he would wait for its coming, and when it arrived, he felt almost transported. An unearthly peace descended upon him; he sang, danced and made merry with his Hassidim as though all his cares and worries had suddenly vanished. On these occasions he was as quiet and gentle as a child with nothing to disturb the tranquillity of his mind.

All the keener, therefore, was his regret when the Sabbath was about to depart. When the last beam of the sun was fading, and darkness gathered about the synagogue, he stood watching at the window, as though witnessing the departure of a dear friend. A prayer he composed on the departure of the Sabbath, one that is still recited by the Hassidim of Ukrainia, runs something like:

"God of Abraham, Isaac and: Jacob. Shield in Thy great mercy Thy people Israel from all approaching evil. I pray Thee on the eve of the departing Sabbath that the coming week may find us strong in Thy holy faith, firm in the love of our fellow men, trusting in the wise and righteous ones and depending upon Thee, O Holy One, blessed be Thou. Inspire in us belief in the precepts of Thy Torah, in the speedy coming of the Messiah, in the quickening of the dead, and faith in the prophecy of Moses, our teacher, peace be unto him.

"Creator of the universe! Thou who girdest the weary with strength, grant strength unto the children of Thy people Israel, that they may praise and serve only Thee and Thee alone; that the days of the incoming week may bring with them strength, health, blessing, children, life and sustenance. May these blessings come unto us and unto all Israel. Amen." [16]

X

The holy days of Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement were Levi Yitzhok's most trying season of the year. His ecstatic temperament reached the breaking point during those days. As though transported, he

ceased to be of the earth and dwelt in another sphere. A divine radiance was said to have suffused his face; and his eyes glowed with a holy fire. The Gentle Hassid became a man whom people were afraid to approach, so strange and fearsome was his conduct.[17]

The whole month of Elul was spent by him in the severest self-discipline. With little sleep or food, he spent his days in unceasing prayer. One of his penances during the penitential season was that, refusing to use his legs, he would literally crawl to the synagogue on his stomach.

He thought to be scoring a point in favor of the Jews when he compared them with the Gentile nations, always, of course, to the advantage of the former. Thus, he interrupted the services one Kippur Eve and addressed God in the following manner:

"Thou hast commanded us to fast this day; but Thou hast also bidden us to eat and drink before the eve of the fast. Were such a command issued to the followers of any other faith, they would execute the second part of the decree so scrupulously that when the time came for fasting and praying none would be left to serve Thee. But not so the Jews! They eat and drink on the eve of the Day of Atonement, as Thou hast commanded, yet, when the time arrives for prayer, behold, they are all here, they, their wives, and their children." [18]

Sometimes Rabbi Levi Yitzhok would interrupt the regular prayers of the synagogue and interpolate a special petition of his own, or, with simplicity, summon the Almighty to a lawsuit. Thus, one Kippur Day, he suddenly stopped the services, and addressed God in the following words:

"Good morning unto Thee, Creator of the Universe.

"I, Levi Yitzhok, son of Sarah, of the City of Berditchev, have come in behalf of my client, Israel, to summon the God of Justice to a trial.

"Speak, I demand of Thee, what hast Thou against

the Jews? Wherein have they sinned to be thus tormented?

"On all occasions it is 'Thou shalt command the children of Israel.'

"Merciful Father, there are so many nations in the world—Persians, Babylonians, Idumeans.

"The Russians, what do they say?

" 'Our emperor is king.'

"The Germans, what do they say?

" 'Our monarch is ruler.'

"The English people, what do they say?

" 'Our potentate is sovereign.'

"And I, Levi Yitzhok, son of Sarah, of the City of Berditchev, say, 'Magnified and sanctified be His great name in the world. . . .'

"Moreover, I, Levi Yitzhok, son of Sarah, of the City of Berditchev, will not stir from my place, will not budge from the spot, until Thou hast put an end to the sufferings of Israel, and the Galuth terminated." [19]

XI

Levi Yitzhok lived a life without friction. Love of Israel, the passion of his youth, followed him to the end. If he had any ambition, it was to bring the sorrows of Israel before God and the world. He was a man of feeling and emotion, but not a philosopher; his faith was too deep and personal to be coolly and critically weighed and examined. He departed little from the masters of Hassidism, except that in his glowing words their teachings assumed fresh meaning and form. The spiritual coins that were minted by them, passed through his hands unchanged. His only work, *Kedushath Levi,* "The Holiness of Levi," is, as its title indicates, more remarkable for holiness than originality. Whatever interest the book may still have for us, is due to the manner of its treatment rather than the novelty of its doctrine.

Prayer, ecstatic, rapturous and self-forgetful prayer, was the chief weapon in the armory of Rabbi Levi Yitzhok with which he went out to meet the Adversary. No other Zaddik's prayers were quite as spirited as his. Like live coals the words issued from his mouth, and those who stood near him were carried away by the fire of his enthusiasm. It is the only way, he taught, a man can make himself heard of his God, and nothing aroused his ire so much as the listless and indifferent prayer. Thus, when a company of Hassidim were one day engaged in the silent prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions without betraying the emotions which their words imply, Levi Yitzhok came over, shook hands with them, and greeted them with the words, "Shalom Alekhem," the customary greeting accorded to strangers, or to those who had returned from a distant journey. The Hassidim were surprised at the unexpected salute, inasmuch as they had not left the city, and were not guests to be thus treated.

Levi Yitzhok noticed their surprise and explained himself in the following manner: "The reason for this salutation is that I could read in your faces that when you were reciting the Silent Prayer, you did not feel the meaning of the words, but were thinking of the grain market in Odessa or the woolen market in Lodz. Now that you have returned from so long a voyage, it is appropriate for me to extend to you a welcome home." [19a]

The misfortunes of his people wounded his heart. Like a widow, lone and forsaken, mourning for her dead, he went about lamenting over the exile of Israel. The strain that his emotions put upon him proved too strong for his weak body, and, many years before his death, his reason departed from him. For days on end he would sit and mutter incoherencies and recite his prayers hurriedly. His community remained loyal to their stricken rabbi and implored God for his recovery. As though suddenly awaking from a trance, Levi Yitzhok recovered his lost senses, and, despite the pleas of his friends and physicians, he

went on with his strenuous life with even greater enthusiasm than before.

He had an indomitable faith in the future of the Jewish people, in the termination of their exile, and their restoration to the land of their fathers. The coming of the Messiah was to him not a dogma, or an article of faith, but his whole being thrilled at the expectation of his advent. He looked forward to his coming day by day, and the delay of his arrival filled him with sadness.

It happened on the Ninth Day of Ab, when the Jews of Berditchev prepared themselves for the fast and were gathered in the synagogue to recite the Book of Lamentations for the loss of Zion and Jerusalem. The rabbi did not join the congregation, but stood at the window peering into the distance. He was waiting for the coming of the Messiah on the very day the Jews suffered the loss of their state and Temple.

He scanned the horizon and examined every shadow that fell upon the street lest it be the shadow of the awaited Redeemer. Night had already fallen and the hour for the prayers long since passed, but the eyes of the rabbi were still looking into space.

The synagogue attendant at last approached him and said, "Rabbi, night has fallen and the time for the Lamentations has come." The words pierced his heart like arrows, and, with loud weeping, he tore himself away from his place at the window, rushed into the synagogue, fell at the foot of the Ark of the Covenant, and recited the dirges with a voice that was choked with sobbing.[20]

XII

A kind and gentle teacher was Rabbi Levi Yitzhok, probably the noblest representative his sect has produced. No other Hassidic leader was so universally loved as he. He stood upon heights so lofty and unassailable that no attempt was ever made to contemplate his life with anything other than the highest admiration. The strife and

turmoil of his day passed him by. Storms raged about this or that Zaddik, but only gentle words came from his lips. The Zaddikim, who were often critical of one another, admitted their admiration for the sage of Berditchev. So gentle was his soul that his colleagues, who bestowed blessings themselves, were made happy when they received the benediction of the "Defender of Israel."

The unique distinction of Levi Yitzhok lies in his combined endowment of soul and heart. None other has made the love of Israel his life-ideal so much as he. He loved his people deeply, lastingly. Like the strings of the Æolian harp, his soul vibrated at the slightest tremble of his nation's fortunes. He lived not for himself but for Israel; it would have been rapture for him to die for them.

If any comparison is to be made, it is with that other great lover of Israel, the Prophet Jeremiah. Like the latter, Levi Yitzhok was a man of sorrows, bent and burdened with the afflictions of his people. Like Jeremiah, he could have cried out, "My heart groans within me; I have no peace," [21] or, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am seized with anguish." [22] But, unlike Jeremiah, the sage of Berditchev "Hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel." [23] Even the prophet of Judea often mixed his speech with the fangs of scorpions, while only words of tenderness flowed from the lips of the kindly teacher of Hassidism. The world, he reflected, was harsh enough to the Jew without needing to add to his burdens.

He often appealed to God, trying to awaken His compassion in behalf of his wronged people; he was unspeakably saddened when his plea remained unanswered. But these disappointments did not embitter him, nor did they weaken his faith in Israel's ultimate triumph, for the Messiah was to him, to use a modern colloquialism, "around the corner," and his coming might at any moment be announced.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhok died the day after the Sukkoth Festival (1810), the holiday which, next to New Year and the Day of Atonement, was closest to his heart.

Simple and modest as was his life, equally simple is his grave. Although loving hands reared a stone structure over it, where his Hassidim gather for prayers and petitions, there is no inscription upon its portals. Nor is one necessary, for no Jew of Berditchev needs to be reminded that one of the holiest and gentlest of men lies buried there.

Chapter VIII

THE RABBI OF LADI: HERO AND MARTYR

There was a marked difference between the Jews of Lithuania and their brethren in the southern provinces of Poland, such as Galicia and Ukrainia. Children of the same race and destiny, they differed from one another in their mental and spiritual outlook. The former sharpened their wits, the latter their imagination. Reason and intellect were honored in one country; the feelings and emotions were cultivated in the other. One produced students and scholars, the other peopled the Jewish scene with dreamers and messiahs. The Talmud became the principal occupation of the Jews of Lithuania, the Polish and Galician Jews let their fancies run riot in the Kabbalah. No one can tell how these differences arose. They may have been due to the climatic conditions of the two countries, or to the nature and temperament of the people among whom the Jews lived; but, whatever their cause or origin may have been, the contrast was striking and unmistakable.

For several decades Hassidism had been making rapid progress. With the force of a new evangel it was converting thousands to its creed, passing like a hurricane through the densely populated sections of southern Poland. Thousands of neglected and forgotten men and women learned to worship God with a new-born enthusiasm that threatened to break the bonds of traditional Judaism. It seemed as though nothing could check the religious intoxication of the half-educated peasant Jews, whose hearts were lighted up as though by sudden magic.

The very opposition they encountered seemed to stimulate all the more their zeal for the new faith.

Swiftly the Hassidic frontier was moving northward. The success Hassidism had met in Galicia and Ukrainia emboldened it to push the campaign into the northern territories. One province alone, Lithuania, stood in the way of its sweeping advance. It was the only country in Eastern Europe which had thus far withstood the onslaught of the new sect. Here alone, of all the Jewish provinces in Russia-Poland, Hassidism failed to take root. Attempts had been made to invade it, but without noteworthy success. There were secret Hassidic groups, or conventicles, in various points in Lithuania, principally Karlin, but they were without power or influence, meeting for the most part in modest quarters or private dwellings, fearful of facing the open challenge of their enemies.

For several centuries Lithuania had been noted for its Jewish scholarship, its academies of learning, as well as for the men whose names and reputation stood high throughout the Jewish world. One of the oldest Jewish habitations in Eastern Europe, it had also been one of the most culturally enlightened centers. Its capital, Wilna, popularly known as "Jerusalem of Lithuania," was the home of Rabbi Elijah Gaon, a man whose comprehensive scholarly attainments were only matched by his saintliness; a scholar, who, though a Talmudist of Talmudists, devoted a treatise to the Zohar and a commentary to Sefer Yetzirah; an intellectual aristocrat who regarded the "plebeian" teachings of Hassidism with disdain. The propagation of no new religious doctrine could, therefore, find ready acceptance in Lithuania unless it bore the stamp of reason and scholarship. Rapturous piety and ecstatic devotion, although attracting the illiterate and semi-civilized peasant Jews of Podolia and Volhynia, could make no impression on a class of Jews who, for generations, had been accustomed to honor the more substantial credentials of the Torah. This is largely

the reason why Hassidism failed to take root in Lithuania, and why the movement that proved so popular in southern Poland, was checked almost at the very gates of Wilna.

Soon there arose a man who, in a lower degree, was of the Gaon's own stature; one who, like Elijah himself, combined wide Talmudic learning with a critical and subtle intellect, qualities that fitted him for the task of harmonizing the principles of Hassidism with the ripest results of Jewish scholarship. A Lithuanian and Talmudist, this man was destined to steer Hassidism into channels heretofore closed to it. With the best traditions of Rabbinism as his native element, he was of a sensitive, emotional nature, which well qualified him to become the apostle of Hassidism in a country where learning, touched with emotion, produced some of its fairest flowers.

Rabbi Sheneir Zalman of Ladi was the man. No better instrument for the difficult task he had set himself to accomplish could be found, for he combined in himself all the gifts of leadership necessary for the difficult and turbulent times that were about to come. For an estimate of the full stature of Sheneir Zalman one must hark back to the leaders of the golden age of Jewish learning. Had he lived in the classical age of Jewish scholarship his name might have been coupled with that of Maimonides, for he possessed many of his characteristics. His preoccupation with the Talmud did not preclude his general interest in the sciences. In addition to his vast knowledge of traditional learning, he is said to have been adept in the sciences of mathematics, physics and astronomy, and intimately familiar with the works of the Jewish philosophers. Like his famous Spanish prototype, he attempted to put order into that chaos, discussion, digression, and contradiction of Jewish Law which form the Shulhan Arukh. He endeavored to throw light into that immense and somber compilation, where it is most difficult for the ordinary man to see with clarity. He abridged, demol-

ished, retained here and rejected there; he made, in fine, a new Shulhan Arukh—clear, comprehensible, orderly.

His mind was clear to the point of subtlety; a dangerous adversary when provoked to controversy, he yet possessed the innocence and simplicity of a child; he was the first to forgive and the last to offend. He possessed a graceful Hebrew style that made the most obtuse subjects clear, and a personality which makes one conjecture how much it was indebted to his physique.[1] Study was his major occupation, yet he knew the ways of the world, and was far from being a pedant or recluse. Although active and energetic, he was as much at home in the arena of life as in his cloistered study. He was courageous and unafraid when challenged to battle, at the same time kind and chivalrous to his most bitter opponents.

II

Nature was lavish in the bestowal of its gifts upon him, as though sensing the high destiny to which he was born. The attractive personality for which he was admired was his from the time of his birth. Little of his early life is known beyond the fact that he was born in 1747, in Liozna, a small town in the province of Moghileff. His father, Barukh,[2] and his mother, Rebekkah, were descended from poor, respectable stock. His childhood was not unusual for a boy of his time and environment. At an early age he was sent to that narrow parochial school called *Heder,* which was as pitiful as the conditions of the ghetto that produced it. He was precocious, as many of the children of the ghetto were; learned easily, absorbed quickly, till his mind was crammed with that uniform pattern of education that was the lot of all the Jewish children of his time. Hebrew prayers, the Bible and the Talmud were dinned into the ears of the youthful student before he became fully aware of their significance. Yet, thinly, hurriedly and instinctively, ideas were inculcated into his mind which remained

with him for life. He was made to understand that he was a Jew and that it was his duty to study the Torah.

From his thirteenth year onward almost every step of his life was recorded, chiefly because of the notice that his scholarship and industry had attracted. He became known as an *Illuy,* or youthful genius, so vast was his knowledge, so profound his erudition. His local teacher, himself a man of considerable learning, freely confessed, "This youth is no longer my pupil; he is my friend and colleague, for he not only can study the Talmud himself but even teach it to others."

When Sheneir Zalman was Bar Mitzvah he was accepted into membership of the *Hebrah Kaddishah,* "Holy Society," of his native town, an organization that, while ostensibly caring for the sick and the dead, is really one of the oldest known Jewish brotherhoods. On that occasion, when his name was entered in the city *Pinkas,* or minute-book, he was crowned with the title "Rabbi," [3] an honor most unusual for a boy of his age. The boundless veneration which the Jews had always had for learning, made a hero of the young prodigy of Liozna, without, however, making him vain, for with Jews humility has always accompanied true scholarship.

The reputation of Sheneir Zalman was now no longer confined to Liozna but reached to other communities as well. Though communication was slow in those days, nothing traveled so fast as the fame of an outstanding scholar. Without newspapers or other publicity, Jews were quick to detect the presence of an eminent talent. Particularly alert for such finds were the fathers of marriageable daughters, who in many instances impoverished themselves, even mortgaging all their possessions, in order to secure for their female offspring learned husbands.

Sheneir Zalman did not escape the fate that awaited all the gifted Jewish boys of his time. At the age of fifteen he found himself wedded to the daughter of a well-to-do Jewish merchant in Vitebsk, and, in accordance

with custom, he made his home with his wife's parents. Marriage produced little change in the youthful scholar.

He relinquished whatever child interests he may have had and surrendered himself to his books. He lived the life of a recluse, took few hours for rest, little time for food, conversed rarely about secular affairs, and his only contact with the outside world was through the little synagogue which he attended for divine services. His mind became as keen and sharp as a blade, absorbing and assimilating everything that came within his range of study. The only temptation he knew was sleep. During his long nocturnal vigils his eyes often grew tired and heavy. In order not to succumb to their plea, he had the chairs and benches removed, studying throughout the night in an upright posture.

His father-in-law, of a more practical turn of mind, and concerned about his daughter's future, could see no point in Sheneir Zalman's never-ceasing study and subjected him to all manner of petty annoyances. Vitebsk was a city of practical men, of traders and merchants and rabbis who knew the ways of the world, but Sheneir Zalman was not one of them. He was too remote and distant from the world, and his father-in-law wondered whether he would ever adjust himself to it. He heard rumors of rabbis who were not half so learned as his son-in-law, yet lived in ease and comfort with their families well provided for, whereas he was still compelled to bear the burden of his daughter's growing family. He despaired of Sheneir Zalman's prospects, feared that his devotion to the Torah would never be rewarded by anything like a brilliant rabbinical career, and counseled his daughter to free herself from her unbusinesslike husband. Unsuccessful in this, he deprived Sheneir Zalman of the one thing he coveted most—lighting material for his night vigils. But nature was kinder to the young student than his father-in-law, for the moon was bright and clear and it illuminated his darkened room with a radiance that rendered artificial light superfluous.[4]

The young student found his moonlight studies wonderful and must have more than forgiven the evil purpose of his father-in-law. Under the summer moon much becomes clear that has been dark and secret before, and many a problem receives its answer in the starlit nights when young hearts surrender themselves to their seductive charm.

Thus several years passed at the home of his father-in-law, years of unremitting toil and labor, without a moment's thought of the reward they would bring him. Early in the morning and late at night he could be found sitting or standing in the little garret, which was silent, except for the steady voice repeating those ancient texts that thousands like him had been studying for hundreds of generations. Through the window, opened to the warmth of the summer, came the scent of fresh-mown hay or the rustle of the leaves, or butterflies who danced about the head of the busy student—yet he was unconscious of it all, intent only upon the books that were open before him.

At the age of eighteen, Sheneir Zalman was already master of the Talmud with all its commentaries and codes, rabbinical learning holding few secrets which had not been disclosed to him.[6] Kabbalah, too, he had studied, and was fascinated by the delight and warmth it brought to his heart. In its strange and fragrant pages he found recreation after the study of property rights and the minutiæ of ritual worship wherewith the Talmud filled his mind. There was something moving and dramatic about the Kabbalah that it could bring a new light to his lusterless eyes and interest him in its study in a quite extraordinary way.

III

Every epochal religious change comes amid crises and tensions; a stormy atmosphere always heralds its approach. To Rabbi Sheneir Zalman the crisis came when

he heard of Rabbi Dob Baer of Meseritz for the first time. The news came to him when his mind was beginning to weaken from the strenuous life he had been leading. An intense dissatisfaction with himself gripped his heart. Was it that he found the Kabbalah more interesting than the wilderness of words and discussions which comprise the Talmud, or was it that his intuition for the first time pointed to his future work and destiny? Whatever the cause of dissatisfaction with himself may have been, once having come, it could no longer be disregarded.

Two conflicting emotions were now stirring within him. As a student of the Talmud he felt it his duty to go to Wilna and sit at the feet of the great Gaon, Rabbi Elijah, but his emotions drew his heart to Meseritz, where lived the master of Hassidism, Rabbi Dob Baer. Wilna or Meseritz became, therefore, the burning question of his life; he could not decide to which to give preference. The mind of the scholar conflicted with the emotions of the enthusiast. At last the heart triumphed and, at the age of twenty, Sheneir Zalman made his first pilgrimage to Meseritz, a visit that, because of its far-reaching consequences, became historic.[6]

The decision was not arbitrarily made, but came after mature thought and reflection. After exploring the whole field of Talmudic learning, he felt that he was still a novice in the service of God. He was mechanically performing the religious functions, yet with little emotional urge. The exacting details he had studied in the Talmud failed to kindle within him the ecstatic fervor that alone makes religion worth while. It was, therefore, to perfect himself in the neglected "duties of the heart" that his choice was Meseritz instead of Wilna.

IV

Sheneir Zalman was an artist at self-portraiture. His letters and diaries reveal him as no other hand could. He

kept a diary all through his stay in Meseritz; he was filled with an admiration for his teacher which almost approached worship. The tense spiritual atmosphere that pervaded the home of his master, contrasted favorably with the subtle legalistic atmosphere in which he had spent his life. The change came rather suddenly, but it was not unwelcome, for there was a weariness in his heart which Meseritz helped to dispel. In his early twenties he was somewhat uncertain of himself; confusion rather than decision characterized his life. Now he felt a singleness of purpose which gave him composure and self-assurance.

Sheneir Zalman regarded the Master of Meseritz as a pious worshiper contemplates the image of his saint. The logical and cool-headed Lithuanian Talmudic scholar found it difficult to think of him as a human being. To him Rabbi Dob Baer was a superman who lived and acted quite beyond the scale of ordinary mortals. He imagined his face to be so transported with supernatural radiance that he hardly trusted himself to look at him. "In his house," he noted in his diary, "miracles could actually be drawn by the bucket." "When our Master spoke," he wrote again, "the *Shekhinah* was speaking through his lips, and the spirit of God was in him, and he was entirely lost to the world." [7] Practically all the notable leaders of Hassidism were his associates and he spent his days and nights in their company.

The great Zaddik was quick to appreciate the value of his new disciple and tenderly drew him to his heart. He recognized his great scholarly attainments and entrusted him with the training of his son Abraham, the "Angel." [8] Their program of studies covered the vast field of the revealed and secret science. Sheneir Zalman later described the advantages he derived from his association with the son of the Preacher of Meseritz. "When a teacher instructs his pupils," he wrote, "he reveals himself to them by means of parables and allegories; but to

his own child he discloses himself as he is, without any mysteries." [9]

The Galician disciples of Dob Baer at first did not take kindly to their Lithuanian colleague and treated him coolly. For some time past there had been a rivalry between the Jews of the two countries which later resulted in estrangement and even active hostility. The *Litvak* was credited with a keenness of mind which his slow-witted Galician brother envied no little. Perhaps the Polish followers of Dob Baer were jealous of the superior intellectual attainments of the latest addition to their camp and resented the special marks of honor which their teacher bestowed upon him.

When the Preacher of Meseritz one day delivered an exceedingly subtle discourse and his pupils asked that he explain it to them, he sent them to Sheneir Zalman, the youngest of his disciples. The latter was embarrassed, and at first would not comply with his teacher's orders, but afterwards, he not only repeated the Master's lecture verbatim, but added his own comments and explanations, making his teacher's words readily understandable.

On another occasion, it is told, Dob Baer came out of his room at night with a lighted candle. Passing through the sleeping quarters of his scholars, he stopped near them, and looked intently at their faces, as though peering into their future. When he came to the sleeping form of Sheneir Zalman, he lingered at his couch a longer time than at the others', muttering half aloud to himself: "How wonderful that this young man who is sleeping unaware on his little pillow should one day become the rabbi of all the provinces of Russia, with multitudes of people listening to his voice." [10] The rabbi uttered a prophecy which did not require many years for its fulfillment, for, much earlier than he realized, Sheneir Zalman was to play his historic rôle in the movement of which he later became an acknowledged leader.

Eighteen months were spent under the tutelage of Dob

Baer, after which he went back to his family as he had promised. But he soon returned for, spiritually, he belonged to Meseritz. He never again left the company of his teacher, remaining with him till the day of his death.

V

Meseritz, the home of his Master, was to Sheneir Zalman a kind of intellectual health resort. His stay there was in reality a period of recovery. In many respects it was unlike the garret study in which he was confined in his father-in-law's house. Most of his time was spent in conversation with the kindred spirits he found there, with whom he worked and planned. Under the guidance of his teacher his own faculties matured quickly. He was preparing himself for the work that was even then taking shape in his mind.

Though mystic lore absorbed most of his time and attention, he nevertheless did not neglect his Talmudic studies. A Litvak he was by birth and training and a Litvak he remained all his life. The atmosphere of learning in which he was reared was preferred by him to the very end of his life. He threw himself into the ecstatic atmosphere of his new surroundings and imbibed its mystic spirit; yet not for a moment was he unfaithful to the love of his youth, the study of the Torah. Those of his friends who spoke lightly of learning and deprecated intensive study found an unsympathetic listener in Sheneir Zalman. When many of his colleagues surrendered themselves to ecstatic fantasies and purposeless antics that made them appear ridiculous in the eyes of the learned Jews, the Lithuanian student clung to the cultivation of the Torah.

Not alone the Talmud, but such practical manuals of religious guidance as the codes, became in course of time so top-heavy with all types of commentaries, glossaries and critical notes as to become inaccessible to any but the most learned scholars. To acquaint oneself with a simple

rabbincal law, one had to wade through mazes of scholastic learning, rendered all the more difficult by a wide divergence of opinions and local customs. Joseph Karo thought he had simplified the matter by publishing his *Shulhan Arukh,* which became the standard work of religious observance, but later scholars defeated the object of his work by making it a peg on which to exhibit their own scholastic subtleties.

It was this confusion, and the need for an authoritative restatement of Jewish law unencumbered by learned wrangles and outmoded local customs, that necessitated the compilation of a new manual of religious guidance. Feeling, as many Hassidim did, that the cultivation of "the duties of the heart" was at least of as great importance as the exercise of the mind, they sought the compilation of a code covering the vast field of rabbinical literature, at the same time stating the principles of religious legislation briefly and concisely.

The work was entrusted to Sheneir Zalman. No man was better fitted for so heavy a task. He not only possessed the necessary knowledge but had the judicious mind as well to understand what to accept and what to reject. He spent three long years in assembling the mass of material, weighing and balancing the pros and cons of arguments, drawing conclusions and arranging them in proper style and place. When the first part of the work was completed the result was a model of industry and lucidity. While he adhered faithfully to the old authorities, Sheneir Zalman delved into the source and origin of the laws and precepts, rejecting all restrictions which he felt were not part of the original legislation—customs and practices no longer in vogue, and, therefore, not applicable to changed times and circumstances.[11] When, after may years, the work was finally completed and published in five volumes, it was accepted as a standard work not only by the Hassidim but by the learned rabbis of the old school as well. The clarity of his style, his judicious

handling of the subject, and the author's wide range of learning made Sheneir Zalman's *Shulhan Arukh* one of the outstanding works of Jewish scholarship.

When, in the year 1772, the Master of Meseritz passed away and his body was about to be cleansed and prepared for burial, lots were cast by his disciples as to the part each was to have in this sad and solemn ceremony. The head of the Master fell to Sheneir Zalman, which was accepted as an omen that he was to fill his place.[12] When however, after the period of mourning was over, and the leadership of the Hassidic movement was offered to him, he refused it, declining the honor in favor of Rabbi Menahem Mendel, a much older colleague, a scholar and mystic of distinction. Circumstances, however, rapidly shaped themselves so that, although officially not at the head of the Hassidic sect, Levi Yitzhak was in actual command of its forces when the exigencies of the times demanded strong and determined leadership.

VI

It was an uncertain and shaky throne that Rabbi Dob Baer bequeathed to his successors. The triumphs which Hassidism was scoring did not remain without reprisals at the hands of the rabbis. Rabbinism had long since scented the danger inherent in the Hassidic propaganda and was determined to put it down with a mighty hand. The traditional rabbi regarded the Zaddik as a dangerous rival to his prestige and standing in the community, one who was feeding on the credulity of the masses among whom he had managed to make himself popular. The aggressive campaign of Jacob Joseph, the popularity of his books and the unflattering manner in which he treated his erstwhile colleagues did not tend to improve the reputation of the Hassidim with their opponents.

At the head of the opposition stood Rabbi Elijah of Wilna, revered by all Jewry, not excluding the Hassidim,

upon whose brow his worshiping admirers had set the twofold crown of *Gaon,* "Genius," and *Hassid,* "Saint." An unusual character was this Elijah of Wilna, the like of whom had not appeared in many a generation. Gifted with an overwhelming brilliancy which explored the vast field of Talmudic and rabbinical literature, there was scarcely a sphere of Jewish studies which was not enriched and illuminated by him. In addition to his amazing scholarship, he was of a modest and retiring disposition, rarely venturing beyond his secluded study.[13]

It was this man who pitted his strength against the advancing tide of Hassidism. The immediate cause of his ire was the disclosure of a secret Hassidic group in his own home-town, Wilna. He ordered the culprits flogged and the sect itself to be treated with the utmost severity. He considered no measure too harsh against this "ill-begotten" offspring of Judaism. "Had I the power," he said, "I would have punished the infidels as the worshipers of Baal were punished of old." [14]

After this long lapse of time it is easy to pass hasty judgment on the supposed impetousity and intolerance of the Gaon. How can his reputed gentleness and mildness of character be reconciled with the extreme severity, even violence, wherewith he proceeded against the Hassidic sect? It must be remembered that Rabbi Elijah was the acknowledged leader and spiritual master of the Jewish people. He was the guardian of the unadulterated faith and traditions of Judaism. He was the spiritual tribune of his people in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. Rabbinism was his native element and the eyes of all Israel turned to him for instruction and guidance. To a man such as this, Hassidism appeared as a schism, something in the nature of a revived Sabbatai Zebiism of Frankism, which threatened the religious unity and continuity of the Jewish faith and people.

Rabbi Elijah's opposition to Hassidism cannot be understood without considering the circumstances that

created his hostility. All that he had heard of Hassidism was not calculated to heighten his respect for its teachings. It minimized the essentials of Jewish life and practice and magnified the small and trivial things; it repudiated the authority of Jewish learning and set up in its place the sovereignty of the Zaddik. In defying the word of the Law it was endangering its spirit; in abolishing the old ritual and establishing houses of worship of their own the Hassidim were sewing the seeds of group warfare in the Jewish household. In short, it was a religious schism which was doctrinally false, nationally disastrous and certain to lead to dangerous consequences.

The outward life and habits of the Hassidim, as they had been reported to the Gaon, were uncouth, gross and repellent, not comporting with the quiet and modest habits of the true "disciple of the wise." The sanctity and dignity of the synagogue worship were disturbed by boisterous songs and dances and every manner of body contortions. Particularly offensive in this respect were the followers of Abraham of Kalisk,[15] who were in the habit of dancing in the streets, thereby making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the Gentiles. These practices made Hassidism appear in the eyes of Elijah of Wilna as a sort of heathenish superstition, falsely masquerading in the guise of Judaism.

It was no time, he thought, for religious dissension in Judaism; no time for the fires of hate and controversy to be stirred up in the camp of Israel. At a time when Talmudic learning was waning, when old-time piety was at its lowest ebb, Hassidism seemed to him an ill wind that threatened to introduce fresh strife and warfare into the already shaken ranks of the Jewish people. He would be a leader unworthy of the great responsibility that rested upon him were he to hold his peace at such a time. He felt impelled to warn his people of the impending danger and to lead his forces against the threatening foe.

VII

It was at this time, as the gloom of the situation was deepening into darkness that Sheneir Zalman took his place at the head of the column. He was practically in sole command of the forces of the Hassidim, since Menahem Mendel, their nominal head, was already an old man and preparing to leave for Palestine. Though a student all his life, he was not without talent for leadership. He had always been eager for action. The turbulent times in which he was living gave him his chance.

Sheneir Zalman resolved upon a daring plan. He was going to meet the Gaon personally and end the dispute in a match of wits. He was not unmindful of the magnitude of the task but did not flinch from his purpose. A personal combat with the subtlest rabbinical dialectician of his time was what he was seeking, and the most earnest entreaties of his friends could not divert him from his plan.

He came to Wilna with his older associate, Menham Mendel, and begged to be admitted into the presence of the Gaon, but the audience was denied them. Again they knocked on the Gaon's door, but it would not open. The leading citizens of Wilna intervened and pleaded with the great rabbi to listen to their argument and thus avert the threatened rift in the Jewish household, but Rabbi Elijah remained adamant. He considered his adversaries as wicked and sinful men into whose faces, according to the precept of the Talmud, one was not to look.[16] Not compromise, but complete and unconditional surrender was what the Gaon demanded. In order to be no longer annoyed by their presence, he left the city and would not return until after he had been assured of the departure of his adversaries. The Hassidic delegation left Wilna disappointed but not discouraged.

One should deplore the fact that the meeting which might have proved decisive never took place. The very

matching of two such intellects, both equally sharp, however opposed to each other, might have proved of real moment in the solution of the conflict. Though the meeting never took place, Sheneir Zalman worked for the cause of peace along other lines, sensing the bitterness that the slight to their venerated teacher had created in Hassidic circles. He engaged in an extensive correspondence, warning his followers against speaking, even thinking, disrespectfully of the Gaon of Wilna, "the like of whom had never arisen in Israel."

Pastoral letters of this kind, enjoining peace and goodwill toward their antagonists, came quite frequently from the pen of Sheneir Zalman. Thus, when "The Testament of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem," a book which is attributed to the founder of Hassidism, appeared, and was burned by order of the Wilna Kahal on the very steps of the Gaon's synagogue, the incident stirred up much feeling in the Hassidic circles. To calm their emotions, Sheneir Zalman dispatched letters in which he pleaded for peace and understanding, pointing out that the writings of Maimonides had not fared any better, but were afterwards venerated throughout Israel. Although he did not shrink from war when it was unavoidable, Sheneir Zalman was essentially a man of peace, and earnestly labored in its behalf throughout the trying years of the controversy.

Meantime, an incident occurred which had the effect of widening the gulf between the two contending camps. For nearly twenty-five years, ever since the publication of the first ban against Hassidism by the Gaon of Wilna (1772), Rabbi Elijah seemed to have taken no further notice of the activities of the Hassidic sect. His silence was construed as indifference. The commander was getting on in years and let the baton rest in his hands. Many soldiers of the old guard certainly thought so and were growing uneasy at the progress the enemy was making. The Hassidim, feeling encouraged by the fact that the

roaring of the old lion had ceased, bethought themselves of a clever ruse whereby they might benefit by the Gaon's silence.

In the year 1796, a mysterious person, accompanied by an attendant, was making the rounds of the trading cities in Germany. The attendant let it be known quietly that his master was the son of the Gaon of Wilna. When asked how the great rabbi felt about the Hassidim, he ruefully answered that Rabbi Elijah regretted his activities against them with all his heart, and, were he younger, he would travel from place to place in order to implore his people to seek shelter in the society of these excellent men. The report soon spread that the son of Elijah was performing for his father the penance of *Galuth,* or "banishment," in order to atone for his unjust persecution of the Hassidim.

The news of the "recantation" of the Gaon caused the wildest sensation in the Hassidic circles, and there was great rejoicing in their midst. But the less gullible Mithnagdim were skeptical, particularly when one, Sundel, assured them that not only did the Gaon remain unrelenting in his opposition to Hassidism, but that his two sons were at that very moment in Wilna engaged in the study of the Torah.[17]

The exposure of the trap recoiled on the heads of the very men who laid it, for, when Elijah was informed of the ruse, his resentment flared up into scorching fury. He not only stamped his supposed recantation as a falsehood, but confirmed (June 22, 1796) his old ban against Hassidism in language much stronger and more uncompromising than before. Consternation and bewilderment fell upon the Hassidim; but they soon regained their composure and let it be known that the second ban of the Gaon was a forgery issued without his knowledge or consent.

The Jews now found themselves in a quandary. The air of the ghetto was filled with charges and counter-

charges. Rumors and denials of rumors were everywhere. To believe or not to believe was the question to which every Jew was seeking an answer. To cut the Gordian knot of the embarrassing situation, the Jews of Minsk, an important Jewish community in Lithuania, dispatched a delegation to Wilna in order to enlighten themselves on the true state of affairs.

VIII

The result was a boomerang; the Gaon was by this time thoroughly aroused to the danger of the situation. He had in the meantime become acquainted with the contents of Sheneir Zalman's published work, *Tanyah,* literally "We Have Learned," and its rationalistic tone did not contribute to mollify his resentment at the dissenting sect. The result was a letter addressed to the Jewish communities of Lithuania, White Russia, Volhynia and Podolia, which was couched in such bitter terms that there was no doubt left as to his position on the question of Hassidism. The encyclical, written on the morrow of the Day of Atonement (5557—October 14, 1796), an apt spiritual morsel wherewith to break a fast, read in part as follows:

"Ye mountains of Israel, ye spiritual shepherds, and ye leaders of every government! Also ye, the Kahals of Moghileff, Polotsk, Zhitomir and Kamenetz-Podolsk; you hold in your hands the hammer wherewith you may shatter the plotters of evil, the enemies of light, the foes of the (Jewish) religion. Woe unto this generation. They (the Hassidim) violate the Law, distort our teachings, and set up a new covenant. They lay snares in the house of the Lord, and give a perverted exposition of the tenets of our faith. It behooves us to avenge the Law of the Lord; it behooves us to punish these madmen before the whole world, for their own improvement. Let none have pity on them and grant them shelter. . . . Gird yourselves with zeal in the name of the Lord." [18]

The Gaon's latest blast came with the force of a terrific explosion, creating the wildest confusion in Hassidic circles, demolishing whatever hope of conciliation was entertained. The circular letter was heralded by the enemies of Hassidism as the collapse of the movement which was now at the lowest stage of its existence. It was read in the synagogues, proclaimed at public assemblies, posted in all places where people could read and acquaint themselves with its contents. It was discussed, debated, and argued about in the homes and on street corners; a sensational document which made the ghetto buzz with excitement. Sheneir Zalman tried in vain to mitigate the disaster by addressing a counter epistle to the Gaon in which he explained his own position in the controversy; he even endeavored to draw him into a literary debate, but Rabbi Elijah refused to deal with a "heretic."

Exasperated by their tormentors to the point of madness, the Hassidim of Wilna were led to commit what was perhaps the greatest folly of their career, a tactless act which called for severe censure not only by their enemies but their friends as well. Rabbi Elijah did not long outlive the "triumph" of his latest campaign against the Hassidim. A year had hardly passed since he signed his famous decree against the men whom he considered adversaries of traditional orthodox Judaism when he passed away (October 9, 1797). It was hardly to be expected that the men whom he had helped to persecute would go into deep mourning at the passing of their most formidable foe, but instead of secret satisfaction, some of the more zealous Hassidic partisans made a public holiday on the day of his death, rejoicing and dancing as though celebrating a great national deliverance [19]—a natural if not an elevated reaction.

This indiscretion filled the city with consternation. The insolence of the Hassidim was not allowed to go unchallenged. On the very night of the burial of the Gaon, a meeting of the leading Jews of Wilna was hastily sum-

moned, and measures comporting with the aroused feelings of the moment were adopted for the suppression of the hated sectaries. A vigilance committee of five, with powers to watch and report on the doings of the Hassidim, was appointed. The slightest infraction of the customary practices of orthodox Judaism was to be punished with severest penalties, not even sparing the members of one's own family. Thus, the fires of hate and persecution, kindled in 1772, were kept alive for twenty-five years.

IX

The struggle became even more bitter and intense after the Gaon's death. As often happens, the disciples exaggerated the thoughts and intentions of the master and arrived at more radical conclusions. The forces of hate, once unleashed, went their own wild way, taking no notice of the havoc and ruin they had brought on. The persecution of the Hassidim, sanctioned by the great rabbi, inflamed hearts less genuine and scrupulous than his own, and they resorted to methods and measures of which he would have been the first to disapprove. Such is the penalty of intolerance that, once aroused, it can no longer be checked.

Never before in Jewish history have Jews given the temporal powers under which they lived an occasion to meddle in their internal affairs. Always jealous of outside interference, they managed their affairs as best they could, without calling upon the government authorities to settle their disputes. This upheaval, however, started in the Jewish household, could no longer be mastered by local hands and it was thought that outside help was needed to restore normal conditions.

To seek reprisals against the Hassidim by denouncing them to the government as creators of a dangerous political movement subversive of the interests of the state was already embodied in the resolutions adopted at the meeting of the Jewish elders of Wilna on the day of the

Gaon's death, but thus far no one could be found to carry the sinister suggestion into practice. However hated the Hassidim were no one could bring himself to be guilty of an act of treachery of which for generations the Jews had disapproved.

All the deeper was the humiliation because the man who was deputized to call in the authority of Gentile courts for the purpose of settling the disputes of the synagogue bore the official title of rabbi. The name of this despicable informer-rabbi was Avigdor, a man who was influenced not so much by piety as personal grudge. For a time he occupied a rabbinical position in Pinsk, but was compelled to surrender his post because of incompetency and the growing Hassidic influence in that town. Unwilling to admit the former charge, he tried to ease his wounded pride and loss of revenue by spreading malicious reports about the Hassidim, whom he held responsible for his discharge. When everything he tried had failed to recapture his lost position, he resorted to the last means of depravity by denouncing his adversaries to the government, principally Sheneir Zalman, accusing him of acts of disloyalty to the Russian sovereign. It was thus that the whole Jewish world was shocked when, about the end of 1797, the report spread that Sheneir Zalman, together with twenty-two other Hassidim, had been seized by the order of the government and committed to prison like common criminals.[20]

It was a "victory" for the synagogue that made all Israel aghast. The reaction that followed produced exactly the opposite effect to the one intended. A shock of pained surprise and disgust passed through the whole of Polish and Lithuanian Jewry, and many of the very people who had been inimical to Hassidism turned to sympathy for the martyred cause.

After a searching investigation by the local police, all the "offenders" except Sheneir Zalman were released and permitted to return home. He alone was detained and

sent in chains under heavy guard to St. Petersburg, where his case was to be tried by the Minister of Justice. Attempts to spare the gentle teacher of Hassidism the humiliation of a common criminal and make his suffering less painful, failed, for, accused of treason, he could be treated with no greater leniency than was due criminals of this class.

While the Hassidim were stunned, they did not allow themselves to lose their sense of balance. They knew only too well that with the Russian officials, bribery would be a more convincing argument than theology. While their rabbi could be depended upon to supply the latter, they took it upon themselves to provide the funds. A campaign, remarkable for the zeal and speed wherewith it was conducted, was set in motion. Emissaries were quickly dispatched to all the Hassidic communities. In a very short time a defense fund of sixty thousand rubles (thirty thousand dollars) was collected.

Sheneir Zalman found himself arraigned before the department which deals with crimes of a so-called political nature. He was charged with being the founder of a harmful religious sect, spreading among the people pernicious ideas, and collecting funds for some mysterious and suspicious purpose in Palestine.

The accused answered the charges in an elaborate document which refuted the indictment against him, point by point. Not being familiar with the Russian language, the document was written in Hebrew, which was sent to Wilna for translation. The defense made a favorable impression on the government circles and, after a report was submitted by the Procurator General, Czar Paul I himself ordered the release of the captive, with the admonition, however, that he and his sectaries should be watched for acts of disloyalty to the government. This happened in November 15, 1798 (19 Kislev, 5559).[21]

Rabbi Sheneir Zalman returned to his home in triumph, amid the applause and jubilation of his admirers. His

followers now revered him not only as a great teacher but as a martyr as well. The day of his release from captivity was decreed to be a holiday which is celebrated to this day. Hassidic legend embellished the event with many entertaining stories. Sheneir Zalman wrote to Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev and to Rabbi Barukh of Medziboz that the pronouncement of his freedom came just as he was reciting the verse from the Psalms, "He redeemed my soul in peace." [22]

Rabbi Sheneir Zalman guessed the feelings of the Hassidim. He knew that his seizure and incarceration would give rise to sentiments of hostility on the part of his followers. Above all, he was eager to save the reputation of the Gaon, which was bound to emerge damaged from the persecutions he was largely instrumental in inspiring. He, therefore, embarked upon a campaign of peace and good will, counselling moderation, even forgiveness, of their enemies, assuring them at the same time that the Gaon bore no part in the treachery committed in his name, and that, were he alive, he would be the first to disown and rebuke it.[23]

X

The ink had hardly dried on the letters of Sheneir Zalman when a fresh assault was planned by his adversaries. The defeat that was suffered by the enemies of Hassidism only stung them to a more ruthless attack. "Rabbi" Avigdor and his cohorts were no novices in this sort of pious blackmail to become discouraged by an adverse turn in their fortunes. The skirmish they had lost had the effect of sharpening their weapons for a more decisive attack. Avigdor addressed an elaborate petition to the emperor in which he attacked Hassidism as a dangerous organization, harboring seditious propaganda under the guise of theology. By a vast array of distortions from the works of Sheneir Zalman and the "Testament of Rabbi Israel," he set out to prove that the teacher of the sect

enjoined upon his followers to fear none but God; in other words, to disregard the authority of the state and the emperor. He repeated all the former charges and penned many new ones. In a document of nineteen paragraphs, Hassidism was pictured as a hideous and pernicious superstition, intended to mislead the people and encourage disloyalty to the crown. The connection of Hassidism with the Sabbatian movement was suggested, and its flirtation with foreign states by sending large sums to Palestine was more than vaguely hinted.[24]

Even if Russia was not disposed to meddle in the religious affairs of its subjects, it could not well ignore so pretentious a document. The constant danger that was lurking from the seditious Poles, and the insecurity of his throne, made Paul I uneasy before the possibility of an uprising on the part of the Jews joining the seditious forces of his enemies. A warrant for the arrest of Rabbi Sheneir Zalman was therefore issued on November 9, 1800. The humiliation of the first arrest and imprisonment was repeated, and after he was brought to St. Petersburg in chains, he was confined in the fortress of St. Peter and Paul, reserved for prisoners of an especially dangerous character.

Sheneir Zalman did not find it hard to demolish the arguments of his opponent. Confronted with his adversary face to face, he tore his charges to shreds, at the same time exposing his hypocrisy and insincerity. Avigdor had by this time made himself repugnant to the very men with whom he was trying to win favor. His greed compromised the larger issue on which he based his claim. While pretending to be crusading in behalf of the offended Jewish religion, he did not, at the same time, forget to enter a personal claim against the Jewish community of Pinsk for certain financial losses. Simultaneously, an investigation into the character and conduct of his opponent brought the most flattering report. On November 27, 1800, three weeks after his incarceration, Sheneir Zalman

was given his freedom, bidden, however, to remain in St. Petersburg pending the review of his case by the Senate. When, in consequence of the March revolution, Alexander I was placed on the throne of Russia, permission was given to the Hassidic leader to return to his home. The triumph of Hassidism, however, was not completed until about four years later, when, in 1804, by the decree of the Russian czar the movement was not only given full autonomy in all religious matters, but was permitted to worship God in separate houses of worship, to appoint their own rabbis and manage their affairs as seemed best in their eyes.[25] While the official sanction of the government was no doubt a real triumph for Hassidism, the official decree really achieved nothing more than to sanction a practice of long standing among the members of the Hassidic sect.

XI

The curtain was thus rung down with a resounding crash on a drama which split the Jewish household into two opposing camps. The rift, in progress for more than fifty years, became at last definite and final. That the division was accompanied by so much strife and bitterness cannot be charged to the Hassidim, for, time and again, they pleaded for peace and understanding. To suppress the growing convictions of millions of hearts, measures had been adopted which, for their severity and ferocity, remain almost unrivalled in Jewish history. Not alone were the Hassidim molested spiritually, but they were oppressed and persecuted physically. Not only were the synagogues closed against them, but the arm of the temporal power was invoked to crush them. They suffered from the intolerance and bigotry of the ignorant, and the most influential powers likewise joined in their extermination. The weapons of persecution which the world had for centuries wielded against the Jews, the latter now used against their own brothers. If the victims

were at times indiscreet in their retaliation and turned against their tormentors, the weakness, although deplored and condemned by their own leaders, can be readily understood and even forgiven.

Sheneir Zalman was the undoubted hero of this drama. He proved not only a good fighter but also a sound statesman. He contended almost single-handed against a whole array of adversaries and emerged victorious. His determination carried him through when many less enthusiastic and zealous than himself would have broken down under the strain. He was cheerful, modest, without vanity or pretense, and did not allow himself to be carried away by personal ambition.

Like the ideal soldier, he knew the cost of war and felt keenly the expense at which it was waged. While he was tireless in resisting the forces of evil, he gladly welcomed every sign and prospect of peace. He built bridges while other men built only barriers. His pastoral letters fairly bristle with the noblest sentiments of peace and good will toward his opponents; and, although he knew that Rabbi Elijah of Wilna was responsible for much of the sorrow that had befallen him, he never ceased paying him the tribute of his deepest veneration.

Chapter IX

THINKER AND WARRIOR

The test of an ideal is the resistance it overcomes. Hassidism emerged victorious from the crucible of this test. For nearly half a century it met the whole Jewish world arrayed against it. Whatever organized Jewry could do to ignore it, to ridicule it, to defeat and crush it, was done without sparing means or methods. Few religious ideas were born amid deeper suffering or pursued their existence against heavier odds than this gleaming hope of thousands of Jewish hearts. Even now that Hassidism had scored its major triumph and won recognition at the hands of the government, it failed to master the secret opposition which was all the more unrelenting because of the defeat it had suffered.

A realist rather than a romanticist in the pursuance of his aims and plans, Rabbi Sheneir Zalman reasoned that to placate the opponents of Hassidism was a wiser policy than to gloat over the victory he had gained. A government decree may compel obedience but it cannot order love and understanding; yet that was vital for the success and triumph of the ideal for which he was laboring. He thereupon visited many towns and villages, acquainted himself with their people, called on their rabbis, and entered into learned discussions with them. Those who were cold and even hostile to him before, were now friendly and cordial, for Sheneir Zalman ceased to be a partisan rabbi and became a celebrity. There was something fascinating about the man who had stood his ground before the mightiest powers in the land. It was this that

appealed to the imagination of people who trembled in the presence of the humblest official in their town. Closer acquaintance also revealed a fairer estimate of the man. They discovered, for instance, that the man who was held to be a renegade and despoiler of the Torah was in reality a scholar worthy of admiration. It was thus that some of the early impressions of Hassidism were corrected and the movement penetrated into quarters which had formerly been closed to it.[1]

While the Jewish countryside was fairly ringing with the fame of the defender of Hassidism, Sheneir Zalman failed to receive his just measure of recognition at the hands of the very men in whose behalf he had been compelled to suffer. The Zaddikim whose thrones he had helped to make secure were critical of his work, jealous of his popularity and even dared to attack the faith and doctrine he was preaching. The intrusion of the Litvak into the circle of the Hassidim was not only resented but held in suspicion by his more reactionary Galician colleagues. Their envy of his success was cloaked in the mantle of piety, for he was teaching a doctrine that was little understood and still less tolerated by the more fanatical followers of emotional Hassidism.

Sheneir Zalman, a rabbinical rationalist all his life, became the originator of a system of Hassidism based on HaBaD, which is an abbreviation of the Hebrew words *Hakhmah, Binah, Deah,* meaning, Wisdom, Reason and Knowledge. Unlike his colleagues, who accepted the poetic and emotional doctrine of Hassidism, he based his teachings upon the foundations of reason and logic. Whereas his friends frowned upon knowledge, scoffed at learning and delighted in the telling of "holy stories," he considered the teachings of his master intellectually. Instead of capitalizing his reputation by building up about himself a personal cult, as some Zaddikim and miracle-worker might have done, and of thriving on the credulity

and fanaticism of the blind believers, he made learning the essence of his Hassidic faith. It was a revolutionary step which some of his erstwhile friends did not hesitate to brand as heretical.

At the time when Hassidism was little more than a trembling hope, when there was need for energies to be conserved in order to keep the feeble spark from being extinguished, warfare developed not without but within the movement itself. Although personal ambition and not holy zeal inspired the crusade against Rabbi Sheneir Zalman, it was conducted with sufficient heat and energy to jeopardize the future and fortunes of the Hassidic sect.

The direct cause of the dispute was the distribution of the funds collected for Palestine. Since time immemorial, the Jews had taken it upon themselves to provide for the religious and charitable institutions in the Holy Land, for which purpose money was raised in almost all the Jewish communities in the world. With his removal to Palestine, Abraham of Kalisk, a disciple of Rabbi Dob Baer, a fanatical Hassid, became the leader of the Hassidic conventicle in the Holy Land, placing himself in sole charge of the distribution of the charity funds. Dissatisfaction with his management soon developed as rumors suggesting the questionable handling of these funds by him were circulated.

Since Rabbi Sheneir Zalman was the virtual head of the Lithuanian Hassidim and trafficking with Palestine funds was one of the indictments he was called upon to answer before the St. Petersburg tribunal, the matter was brought to him for arbitration. While he did not wholly relieve his former friend and colleague of supervision of the Palestine moneys, he asked for a more methodical and equitable system of collection and management of these funds. The aspersion on his probity aroused the ire of Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, who left the matter to his Galician fellow Zaddikim for determination.

II

The question, which was comparatively simple, proved a mound of powder to which a spark had been applied, unearthing the subterranean jealousies stored away all these years, which were now given a chance to show their ugly heads. Greed and ambition were masquerading under the guise of piety. Instead of refuting Sheneir Zalman's policies regarding the Palestine moneys, they launched a vituperative broadside against his theology, accusing him of distorting the teachings of Hassidism and misleading the people with false and pernicious doctrines. Thus they repeated in substance precisely the charges that were levelled against him by the informer, "Rabbi" Avigdor.

The sparks that flew in the course of the controversy fell in other places as well and met with only too hospitable a reception at the hands of such a man as Rabbi Barukh of Tulchyn, who was enthroned in Medziboz. A vain and avaricious individual, critical of his fellow Zaddikim, contemptuous of every man he could not dominate, his only claim to distinction was his relationship to Israel Baal Shem Tob, whose grandson he was and in whose chair he sat. The following episode is characteristic of the man who went forth to make war on Rabbi Sheneir Zalman in the name of the offended faith of his grandfather.[2]

When, as a result of a Russian decree, thousands of Jews were expelled from villages, forbidden to own or operate inns and taverns, Rabbi Sheneir Zalman made the rounds of the Jewish communities in Poland to collect funds for the hapless victims. In the course of his travels he came to Medziboz, where he was met with a savage attack at the hands of the local Zaddik, Barukh, for invading his territory. When Sheneir Zalman justified his conduct on the ground of the emergency, and pictured to the holy man the plight of the unfortunate villagers who would die

from starvation if no help was forthcoming, the wearer of the crown of Rabbi Israel cried out, "What business is it of yours? Let them die." [3]

Another incident, characteristic of the sanctimonious humbug of Medziboz, occurred during the same interview. Rabbi Sheneir Zalman, trying to arouse his colleague's nobler feelings, remarked in the course of the controversy: "What cause is there for any misunderstanding between us? Have I not suffered martyrdom and twice been dragged in chains to St. Petersburg, all that the name and reputation of your grandfather might be vindicated? Might I not have said, 'There is his grandson, Rabbi Barukh, in Medziboz. Send for him that he may come and answer for his grandfather.' " To which the inheritor of Baal Shem Tob's throne answered, "What need was there of all the bother? Could you not have passed your hand over your face and forehead, and all the hardships and difficulties would have disappeared?" [4]

It was under the base ingratitude of men such as these that Sheneir Zalman was smarting to the point of distraction. Although envious and contentious men tried their best to embitter him, his letters fail to reveal the state of his feelings. On the contrary, they were models of moderation, patience, and dignity. He bridled his temper and invariably adopted a conciliatory tone. He not only defended himself against his adversaries with humility, but endeavored to win back their love by reminiscing on their common experiences in the house of their teacher, the Master of Meseritz. He was not always successful in converting his enemies, but few men disputed the sincerity and honesty of his motives. As in other controversies, he emerged victorious also from this dispute.[5]

The laurels bestowed upon him by his teacher were worn by Sheneir Zalman with greater pride now than ever before. Those were no undeserved honors to which

he had been called. His crown of leadership was woven of the thorns of suffering and martyrdom and the scepter often pierced his hand. The acclaim which came to him was no empty shout but betokened the admiration for a leader who had proven himself unflinching in the execution of the charge that time and circumstances had laid upon him. He served in the triple capacity of leader, priest and prophet, for he not only ministered to his people and led them on to their goal, but also pointed to the new destiny—that of an enlightened faith—which Hassidism should follow if it were to perpetuate itself for all time.

Through all these years, Liozna, the town in which he was born and in which his faculties had first matured, remained, except for his sojourn in Vitebsk and Meseritz, the scene of his active life. He made frequent excursions, but always returned to the city that witnessed his sufferings and triumphs, refusing larger and more remunerative posts. As though driven by destiny, he was impelled, toward the end of his life, when past sixty, to exchange the familiar scenes of his birth and long residence for a new habitation, Ladi.[6] Though his stay there was short, it is with this city that his name remains associated to this day.

III

Sheneir Zalman is the philosopher of Hassidism, as Maimonides is of Rabbinism; the latter wrote the *Moreh,* the former the *Tanyah,* which Simon Dubnow calls the "Hassidic Guide for the Perplexed." Although not a trained thinker, he surveyed with his penetrating mind practically the whole field of metaphysical speculation and came to conclusions that had in many cases been anticipated by men whose very names he had never heard. The tendency to philosophizing seems to have been instinctive with him, for he often indulges in it unconsciously. The inquisitive, searching mind is always at

work and philosophical ideas flow freely and easily from his ever-busy brain. It was a legacy which came to him from his Talmudic studies, where nothing is taken for granted but everything is carefully examined and analyzed.

Yet it is as a religious philosopher, not as an abstract thinker on general metaphysical problems, that Sheneir Zalman must be considered. The ideas that came to him originated from the highest source. The quest of God was his greatest concern, and it is to this that his *Tanyah* is largely devoted. The scientific questions of philosophy did not particularly interest him; he not only considered them as useless matters but even cautioned his readers against them.

While he was not unacquainted with the philosophical movement of mediæval Jewry, his impulse to philosophy did not arise from the need of harmonizing Judaism with the prevailing thought of the day, as was the case of Maimonides and the other philosophers of the Spanish school. No such problems as confronted the Sage of Fostat troubled the rabbi of Ladi. The truths of Judaism were to him too sufficiently demonstrated to need confirmation from the heathen thinkers.

Though a Kabbalist and mystic, Rabbi Sheneir Zalman was a clear and lucid thinker. His ideas are orderly, his style transparent. Whereas the thoughts of other Hassidic thinkers can be gleaned only after considerable difficulty from the mass of commentaries and interpretations of biblical texts, his ideas flow easily in a coherent and well-ordered system. Like his noted Spanish forebear, system was his leading passion, and he achieved it by making his thoughts clear and understandable.

IV

The creation of the world is a problem that staggered all the Kabbalists who dabbled in metaphysics. From Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria to Sheneir Zalman,

Jewish mystics found it difficult to explain how the material world arose from a spiritual Deity without compromising the unmateriality of God. The Sage of Safed thought he had mastered the difficulty by evolving the doctrine of *Zimzum,* or "Concentration," according to which the world came into existence as a result of a series of self-imposed limitations, or concentrations, on the part of the Deity. Dob Baer accepted this doctrine without further examination. But Sheneir Zalman detected in it a suspicion of duality which he was desirous to avoid. To escape it, he proposed his own solution, which, although leaning on the theory of Rabbi Luria, is an improvement on it.

According to his theory, the creation of the world did not flow directly from God, but in quite a different way. The En-Sof, by reason of His infinite wealth of light, radiated from Himself a spiritual substance, a force, whatever be its name, which, following directly from Himself, partakes of His perfection and infinity without, at the same time, making Him directly responsible for the creation that emanated from it. Conceiving creation in this way, it cannot be considered as original, i.e., as coming from God Himself, but as derivative, or, so to speak, the work of an agent.[7]

After solving the problem of creation, Sheneir Zalman evolved a theory of the universe which, not without a suggestion of pantheism, makes the opposition between the world and God fall away. According to this theory, God is not external to the world but is the underlying principle of all the particular forms, containing them within him, as, to use his beautiful simile, the flame is contained in the candle which feeds it. "The multiplicity that one beholds in the cosmos, the whole panorama of thought, action, goodness, badness, the soul, the mind—all things that go to make up the pageant of man's life in the universe, are emanations, radiations from the One Unity, manifestations of God from Whom all things flow

and to Whom they must all finally return, because they are ultimately one with the One, just as the flame is one with the candle from which it issues." [8]

God is the Inner Cause, the Great Reality, the Eternal Substance, from which all things in the cosmos radiate and in which they have their being. He never rests nor wearies, but is constantly creating new forms in an endless variety. "When the vessel leaves the hand of the potter," says Rabbi Sheneir Zalman, "it is no longer dependent upon its maker, but not so is the world with all its visible manifestations, which cannot exist even for a moment without the vigilant eye of their Creator." [9]

Although Rabbi Zalman often suggests Spinoza, it would be an error to believe that he was influenced by him; for, besides never having read his books, or even heard his name, their differences are at least as sharp and important as their agreements. Thus, while Spinoza identifies God with nature, and speaks of *deus sive natura,* "God or nature," the God of the Rabbi of Ladi is above and greater than nature and, should He want it, may even change it. While Spinoza taught the eternity of matter, eternity, according to the teachings of Sheneir Zalman, is the attribute of God alone. Spinoza conceived of nature as being without plan or purpose, while *takhlith,* or purpose, is a fundamental principle in the teachings of Judaism. Determinism, or Necessity, is the foundation upon which the Amsterdam philosopher reared his system, saying that even God Himself works according to inflexible laws of nature, a doctrine that would have been denounced by Sheneir Zalman as heresy. Whereas Spinoza denied the possibility of miracles, asserting that the beauty and orderliness of nature deserve more of our admiration than the interference with them, the rejection of miracles would be considered by our Hassidic thinker as depriving God of His sovereignty. Spinoza taught a vague doctrine of immortality, saying that when the body dies the mind does not wholly perish with it, but the

eternal modus residing within it remains; while to the author of *Tanyah,* immortality was as real, clear, and definite as God Himself was to him real, clear, and definite. While virtue, to the one, consists in following the fixed, eternal and unalterable laws of nature, to the other its prize is won by following the precepts of the Torah as interpreted by the sages of the Talmud and exemplified by the lives of the Jewish saints and teachers. To Spinoza the Bible is the work of man, and not without gross errors and contradictions; to Sheneir Zalman, it is the unerring and infallible word of God. The one looks at the world calmly and dispassionately, without feeling or emotion, as though it were made up of "lines and surfaces"; the other is fairly athrill with emotions of the most ecstatic nature when he contemplates the mystery and majesty of God and creation. The one discovered his God in nature, the other found nature in God; one was pronounced a heretic and was driven from the synagogue, the other was venerated as a saint and loved by his people; one left his doctrine in books, the other wrote his name on the hearts of men who loved and admired him. While Spinoza was acclaimed by the world as a great man and a philosopher, thousands throbbed to the name of the kind and gentle teacher of Ladi, with a soul as pure as sunlight, and a character that was crystal-clear.

As in the case of other Kabbalists, the soul, its origin and destiny, its nature and influence, occupies a large part in the philosophy of Rabbi Sheneir Zalman. Next to his examination of God, the psychic life is a subject to which he devotes much time and space in his *Tanyah.* Yet, while the author is often keen and penetrating, tracing the psychical processes to their minutest detail, it was the practical application of his investigation that interested him. He was concerned with psychology only insofar as it influenced human conduct and actions, aiding men in his conquest of self and his spiritual struggle for existence. Like many other Jewish thinkers, he was a moralist rather

than an abstract philosopher, an ethicist rather than a metaphysician. The passion that dominated him was not inspired by the love of idle speculation, but to discover a way of life for himself and his fellow men.

V

With Spinoza, Sheneir Zalman might have proclaimed *amor dei intelectualis*. In his writings there are many passages that express the spirit, if not the very words of the Amsterdam philosopher. The God of the Rabbi of Ladi was not a God of the emotions, but one who can be comprehended by the rule of *Hakhmah, Binah, Deah,* or Wisdom, Reason, Knowledge, although emotion plays no small part in his religious thinking. King Solomon, he said, rose to fame and power by no other means than his superior wisdom.[10] Such faith had he in the saving power of reason, that it alone, he maintained, was sufficient to unlock for man the gates of the higher life of the spirit.

Fear of God vanishes where knowledge and understanding of Him are enthroned. Rabbi Zalman expresses himself critically of that fear of God which is conditioned by our personal weal or woe. "There are men," says the Zohar, "whose fear of God is influenced by the dread of physical punishment, or the loss of money. Such an attitude of mind is not to be described as 'Fear of God,' but rather, fear of evil." [11] "The fear of God which comes from the fear of punishment," taught Rabbi Israel, "is purely external, and is like the man who feareth the bear or the lion." [12] The fear of God, however, which ennobles and purifies man and makes him partake of the higher life is the fear which is derived from an intelligent contemplation of the beauty and marvels of creation. Sheneir Zalman's own attitude to God is expressed in his exclamation: "I have no need of Thy promise of heaven. Thee alone I need, and for Thee alone I yearn, to be absorbed in Thy Holy Being." [13]

Prayer is the strongest weapon in the religious armory of the Hassid. All the Kabbalists emphasized its importance, although some of them set its ideal so high as to be well-nigh unattainable. By the proper use of prayer one may rise to spiritual heights not even accessible to angels. Not even God can withstand the ecstasy of prayer.

Rabbi Zalman not only did not depart from the general Hassidic doctrine of prayer, but even widened its domain by declaring that it is the foundation and essence of the Torah and the channel by means of which the divine influence may be diverted to this earth. In every genuine prayer, he said, may be discerned the possibilities of the Messiah and the superiority of man over the lower animal kingdom.[14] Such importance did he ascribe to prayer that he spent much time in arranging the liturgy and devising rules and regulations for its conduct. It was one of the redeeming virtues of the sect he had founded that, although his Hassidim worshiped with an intensity of fervor and devotion, they did not exhibit the frantic boisterousness that made the Hassidic synagogue ridiculous in the eyes of its critics.

Rabbi Zalman made his philosophy serve an ethical purpose; his writings are full of precepts and maxims for the practical guidance of his Hassidim. He made tolerance a special subject of his exhortations. Having been a victim of intolerance himself, he remembered its sting only too well. Men, he said, differ inwardly as they differ outwardly; they are as little alike in their mental and spiritual qualities as in their physical characteristics. We must, therefore, learn to tolerate each other's ideas and opinions as we tolerate each other physically. The doctrine which he taught to others he exemplified in his own life. No other man was more patient in suffering, more gentle to his friends, more forgiving to his enemies than he. When persecuted by his opponents and betrayed by the very men for whose cause he suffered he never per-

mitted himself to reveal his wounded feelings but bore his disappointment in silence.[15]

His doctrine of *Zeddakah,* or "Benevolence," rounds out the ethical idealism of his teachings. Although of high standing in the Bible and the Talmud and, according to Maimonides, man should be more careful concerning the practice of charity than any other precept, Zeddakah plays a comparatively small part in the teachings of the Kabbalists. So occupied were they in contemplating the nature and destiny of the soul, that they quite forgot the needs of the body. What cared they for the temporary life when Eternity was at stake? Since they denied themselves to the world, they could not very well recommend it to others.

Not so was Sheneir Zalman. His words are never so uplifting as when he makes Zeddakah his theme. A few quotations from his writings will illustrate his views on the subject. "Zeddakah," he says, "is the soul and substance of all the Mitzvoth." [16] "The Shekhinah is revealed neither in the Torah nor in prayer, but only in Zeddakah." [17] "Zeddakah is a magnet that possesses the power of drawing out the divine influence more than any other precept." [18] "It purges man of sin and restores him to innocence." [19] "It is the best remedy against dark and evil thoughts." [20] "The very hand that performs it becomes a limb in the chariot of the Holy One." [21] "As the flash of lightning breaks through the blackness of the clouds and illumines the earth, so does the practice of Zeddakah bring light and understanding to the human soul." [22] "It establishes peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven, and brings blessing to the world." [23] The very word "Zaddik," he said, points to the high destiny to which he was born—to make the cause of Zeddakah triumph.

Although in his Hassidic system the Zaddik has a given place, he is more of the type of the Lithuanian Talmid

Hakham than the Galician or Ukrainian miracle-worker. Rabbi Zalman did not raise the Zaddik to that position of eminence that he occupies in the teachings of the other Hassidic leaders. His Zaddik is a teacher and instructor of his people rather than a demigod to be worshiped. If he has any authority at all, it is the authority that goes with his superior learning rather than the pretended authority of superior birth. The court of his Zaddik provides no place for the swarming religious adventurers who come to while away their time in ecstatic transport. It is more of a Beth Hamidrash than a shrine, a house of study than a Hassidic conventicle. Pilgrims to such a court are attracted not by curiosity, but study; they are drawn not by the person of the Zaddik, but by the message he has to deliver.

VI

As might have been expected, learning stood high in the estimation of the Lithuanian Talmid Hakham. The passion of his youth stayed with him to his very end, and no other infatuation was strong enough to take its place. Other Kabbalists spiritualized the Torah, and discovered in its words, and even letters, hidden mysteries, but to Rabbi Zalman the Torah was a bride that he admired for her own lovely self without any other embellishments or adornments. While other Hassidic leaders subordinated the study of the Torah to prayer, he set its kingdom so high that nothing could supersede it. "The revealed Law in its entirety," he said, "is spoken of as a 'Tree of Life unto those who lay hold of it,' and not only the Zohar and the other Kabbalistic works." [24] "Only by means of the Torah can the soul comprehend His exalted Name," [25] and "the spiritual delights of the soul can be attained only when one has comprehended the mysteries of the Torah." [26] The joy of the Torah which he had experienced himself, he endeavored to impart to his Hassidim, to the end that, unlike their colleagues of other affili-

ations, they became marked for their love of and devotion to Jewish learning.[27]

To his end Sheneir Zalman remained the scholar that he was. The influence he imbibed in his youth stayed with him. The high-charged emotional atmosphere in which he found himself failed to weaken the attachment of his youth. The glowing ore of learning which had been poured into him in the *Beth Hamidrash* was hardened with the passing years till it became impervious to attack. While many of his colleagues poked fun at scholarship and warned their disciples not to abandon themselves to study overmuch, he followed the ideal which had been inculcated in him in his father's home. While his co-workers abandoned themselves to all kinds of fantastic religious orgies, he rewrote the *Shulhan Arukh,* composed the *Tanyah,* and engaged in an extensive correspondence for the purpose of endearing the study of the Torah to his followers. The Hassidim often mocked and taunted him and charged him with founding an intellectual aristocracy that was not the original intention of the founder of their sect, but he understood the spirit of Rabbi Israel better and continued his work. When Solomon Karlin wanted to settle in his neighborhood and consulted Rabbi Zalman about it, the latter replied that he would agree to it only if he promised not to make light of the study of the Torah.

Sheneir Zalman applied the Torah concept in its widest sense and made it cover both sacred learning as well as secular. His knowledge of the sciences, especially mathematics, seems to have been fairly high; he had a fine sense of style, although his Hebrew grammar is often defective. He neither hid nor apologized for his interest in profane studies, no doubt having been encouraged by the example of the Gaon of Wilna, who not only was a good mathematician, but wrote a book on trigonometry. He had a strong penchant for philosophy and loved to toy with metaphysical speculations. While Nahman Bratzlav

prayed for "pure faith without the sophistications of the philosopher," Sheneir Zalman made no secret of his familiarity with the works of Jewish thinkers. Maimonides, who is rarely mentioned, and often abused by the Hassidic saints, was held by him in the highest esteem and was fond of quoting from his *Moreh.*[28]

It is upon the pillars of reason and not blind and irrational belief that Sheneir Zalman reared the foundations of his faith. Although sublime and solemn, it is, nevertheless, not without color and warmth. He was not a rationalist who sacrificed everything to the goddess of pure reason. He was rather a symbol of the Lithuanian scholar in whom faith and reason, knowledge and ecstasy were combined. Yet, neither one nor the other quite completely dominated him. While learning was his passion, he was at the same time no stranger to the impulses of emotion that stirred within his soul. His best work, *Tanyah,*[29] literally glows with emotions of the purest kind which, indeed, shine forth from everything he said or wrote. The most ordinary subject was lifted by him to the highest plane of religious exaltation. He was, indeed, a religious philosopher, the most eminent thinker produced by Hassidism, one in whom philosophy fraternized with feeling. He aimed at a synthesis that would harmonize the faith he loved with the reasoned belief of Jewish thought.

VII

The remaining few years of his life were as stormy as the earlier ones. Not until his end was the soldier to return his sword to its scabbard. The fate that dogged his steps all his life, followed him to his grave. The change from Liozna to Ladi, calculated to bring him rest and quiet, brought him nothing but suffering, exile and, ultimately, death. The shadows that followed him ever since he matured to manhood, deepened into gloom until they closed about him in eternal silence.

With the auriole of martyrdom about his head, and his reputation as the defender of the Hassidic faith spread far and wide, Rabbi Sheneir Zalman was prepared to retire from the active scene of his life and spend his remaining years in the rest and peace that he so well deserved. The many controversies in which he was compelled to engage, the need for absenting himself from his home for long periods of time made his otherwise powerful constitution show signs of weariness. Rest and quiet were the things he longed for most; rest from the turmoil of his busy life, and quiet for carrying out those ideas and literary plans that were busying in his mind.

As a student and scholar he looked ruefully at books long remained unopened. As a literary man, he regarded with regret those thoughts and ideas that had been rudely interrupted by the turn of events. His strenuous life left him no time for the occupation he loved most. The fact that, despite his overtaxing activities, he was one of the most prolific authors of his day, is an illustration of his amazing energy. The scholar and the busy man of the world were constantly at odds within him. In his life there was a rivalry between the sword and the pen; and, though he never relaxed the former, he felt himself instinctively inclined toward the latter.

Yet, like a general summoned from retirement, Sheneir Zalman was again pressed into service, this time in behalf of a cause seemingly outside his special interests. The leader of many battles was now called upon to face a danger greater than he had hitherto known. While the fate and future of Hassidism were by this time fairly secure, it was the position of the Jews and Judaism which, in his opinion, was threatened, and this now engaged his attention.

VIII

It was during the early days of 1812, when Napoleon was at Moscow, that the French Emperor stood forth

as the master of the European continent. Thousands of Jews were watching the campaign with bated breath, for upon its outcome depended the fate of the largest Jewry in the world. Since the Jews acted only as spectators in that historic struggle, it is surprising to learn what overtures were made by the two contending parties to the hounded and persecuted denizens of the ghettoes of Russia and Poland.

Not until Dubnow had written his "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," was anything like justice done to the part the Jews had played in that famous war. It must not be forgotten that, although the Jews were noncombatants, the struggle was fought in an area thickly populated by Jews. The success or failure of an engagement often largely depended upon which side the Jews were to be found. It is, therefore, not surprising that on the very eve of the war, Napoleon Bonaparte and Czar Alexander I sued for the favor of their Jewish subjects. When Napoleon, in 1806, created the Jewish Parliament, the Russian monarch suspected that the measure was a ruse to gain the friendship of the Jews of Europe, and countered it by summoning Jewish deputies to share in the legislative work of the Russian government.[30]

But the attitude of the Jews to Napoleon was confused and divided. It swung from the attitude of the warmest love and admiration to the deepest fear and distrust. Together with all the world, Napoleon dazzled and intoxicated the Jews. He revealed a personality, an overwhelming brilliance such as had scarcely been shown by any other man. Men marvelled at him, loved him, worshiped him, deified him. His name eclipsed all other names. To millions of men he was a sort of demigod, a Messiah, a Redeemer. He not only promised freedom, but gave it. He dreamt of building a state based upon the unassailable principle of the right of every man to rise to the highest place to which his powers and capacities would entitle him. He more than recognized equality; he

honored it. He made its name ring in France, and soon after, in the whole world. Wherever his campaigns led him, he took with him the spirit of the new times. He abolished the Inquisition in Spain; he brought human rights for the Jews into Germany; he established the Code of Napoleon with its liberal principles, and convoked a Consistory of Jews which made them almost dream of Messianic times.[31]

The news of his triumphs filled the hearts of Jews with unbounded joy. An emotion of hope and expectation swept over the whole of the Jewish people. They greeted his coming as the advent of the long-deferred Redeemer. The harp of Zion, silent a long time, was attuned to hymns of praise and thanksgiving. They pictured their future in terms of grandeur and glory. They saw the shackles of oppression and suppression fall from their hands, and believed that the time had at last come when the Jew would take his rightful place among the nations of the earth.

IX

But there were others among the Jews who would not let themselves be swept away by the hysteria of the moment and refused to join in the general enthusiasm. They remembered similar experiences in the past and profited by their example. They looked beyond the present condition of their life and dreaded the possibilities of a change. They regarded the promise to alleviate their present suffering as a connivance to lure them from the religion of their fathers. Of what use was freedom to them if it was to lead to license? The prize was not worth the price. Rumors of the Corsican's godlessness had reached them. He was pictured as an atheist, an agnostic, as a man without religion or morals, the embodiment of ruthless and material power. Christians spoke of him as Antichrist, and Jews as a Nebuchadnezzar, one bent upon the accomplishment of some diabolical purpose

from which the Jews would, in the end, be the worst sufferers.

To this group of political skeptics belonged Rabbi Sheneir Zalman. He shared the opinion of the more conservative element of the Jews and became a formidable opponent of the French conqueror. Although he suffered much at the hands of the Russian officials, he would not exchange the old bondage for the uncertainties of the future under Napoleon. The spell of the Corsican had no magic for him. He feared the reaction and trembled for the future. What were economic freedom and political rights to him if the future of Judaism as a religion was at stake?[32] He suspected Napoleon's motives and contrasted his reported cruelty and indifference to the sacrifice of millions of people, with the reputed gentleness of Alexander, whom he portrayed as the embodiment of meekness and humility, a monarch filled with the fear of God and love for his fellow men.[33]

Sheneir Zalman stated his position quite clearly in a letter addressed to Moses Meisels at Wilna. "It was revealed to me," he writes, "on Rosh Hashanah, before the Mussaph prayers, that, should Bonaparte win, the wealth of the Jews would be increased, and their civic position raised. At the same time, their hearts would be estranged from our Heavenly Father. Should our Czar Alexander win, however, the hearts of the Jews will draw nearer to our Heavenly Father, though the poverty of Israel may become greater and their position lowered."[34]

It was comparatively an easy matter for Rabbi Sheneir Zalman to rouse his Hassidim and rally them to the support of their monarch to pray for his victory, for they well remembered the part he had played in their historic emancipation. It was by his manifesto of 1804 that Hassidism was given religious equality and administrative autonomy in their communal affairs. The agitation of the rabbi bore fruit. Although weakened by age and his strenuous life, he threw himself into the campaign with

youthful vigor, to the end that a favorable reaction to Russia was created wherever Hassidim were to be found.

Not only the followers of Rabbi Sheneir Zalman, but almost all the Jews of Russia conceived it as their patriotic duty to array themselves on the side of their country in its life-and-death struggle against Napoleon. With the coming of Alexander I to the throne, favorable signs began to appear on the Jewish horizon in Russia. For the first time it was recognized that the conditions of the Jews were intolerable and commissions were appointed to study them with a view to their amelioration.[35] That these hopes would come to nought in the reaction that followed the war, no one could have foreseen at the time. How far the Jews had done their part may be gathered from the statement of the Russian historian Davidov, who wrote: "The frame of mind of the Polish inhabitants was very unfavorable to us. The Jews living in Poland, however, were devoted to us, and refused to serve the enemy as scouts, and often gave us valuable information concerning him." [36]

X

In the meantime, however, the legions of the French Emperor were sweeping through Russia with lightning-like speed, till they came to Rabbi Zalman's own city, Ladi. Not for a moment did the rabbi doubt the ultimate outcome of the struggle. When the Jews of his community were seized with panic, he calmed and comforted them. When city after city was taken by the enemy, and fortress after fortress was razed to the ground, he never wearied of encouraging the terrified population. He prophesied that the enemy would get as far as Moscow and then collapse. The Russian army officers were acquainted with his patriotic services and showed him their gratitude.[37]

When he felt that he was no longer safe in Ladi, he gathered his family and fled from the city, saying: "I

would much rather die than live under him (Napoleon), and witness the evil which will befall my people." Sheneir Zalman arrived at Krasny, but there, too, the enemy was in hot pursuit. For some time the rabbi and his family lived as fugitives, wandering like nomads from place to place, often spending the night in the forest under varying weather conditions.

Exposure on one of these occasions made the rabbi ill; for want of any other shelter, he accepted the hospitality of a Russian village peasant. Even his sound constitution could not withstand this strain. For several days he lay exhausted, barely able to rise. The primitive conditions of the village did not provide for the comforts he needed, not even the luxury of a doctor and medicine. To his family it was quite evident that death could not be far off, yet they clung to his couch, with prayers upon their lips. The patriarch lingered on for nearly a week. Although his body was steadily weakening, his mind remained clear to the end. When his eyes grew dim, he motioned to one of his grandchildren and asked: "Do you see the ceiling? I cannot see anything any longer. I can only see the spirit of everything, and the power of God to create and animate all living things," and with this he died.[38] Thus a life that had been all bustle, energy and stress flickered out. He died in the year that marked the collapse of Napoleon's Russian campaign, and which gave the final blow to his dream of world empire.

Rabbi Sheneir Zalman was buried on December 28, 1812, at Hadiatz, in the province of Poltava, eight (Russian) miles from the scene of his final illness.

XI

With Rabbi Sheneir Zalman Hassidism entered upon a new career. By making the rule of reason prevail in a movement founded upon emotion, he saved Hassidism from degenerating into a system of superstition and blind fanaticism. The power that he wielded over his followers

was not through the cheap trickery employed by some of his contemporary Zaddikim, whose courts swarmed with adoring worshipers. He never held himself forth to his disciples as a saint or miracle-worker, but as a teacher whose mission it was to instruct rather than to dazzle with his supernatural accomplishments. The throngs that filled his house came to be enlightened rather than entertained. He laid claim to no higher authority than the one conferred through the knowledge of the Torah. The title "Rabbi," which he honored in his youth, he bore all his life, refusing to exchange it for any other distinction, such as "Rebbe" or "Zaddik."

He was a bold, courageous and audacious combatant when provoked to battle. The outstanding history-making period of Hassidism revolves around his name. If Sheneir Zalman did not create the Hassidic movement, he had done much to make it secure. When the Hassidic demigods were ensconced on their thrones of glory, receiving the plaudits of their worshipers, the shackles of martyrdom cut deeply into his flesh. And yet he bore himself modestly and humbly, without a boastful word to betray the part he played in the sharp struggle. A high-minded teacher, a clear thinker, a noble fighter, and a still more noble lover of peace, the choicest blend of reason and feeling, of thought and emotion that Hassidism produced was Rabbi Sheneir Zalman.

Sheneir Zalman was a better theologian than a statesman, an abler polemical writer than a political observer. The part he played in the Napoleonic Russian campaign was the least service he rendered his people. While he was not blind to the situation, and saw that no political or material good could come to the Jews from a victory for the powers that were allied against Napoleon, he did not surmise the full extent of the catastrophe. The Corsican's retreat from Moscow not only signalled a reversal in the fortunes of the French Emperor, but also a collapse of the political and economic emancipation of the Jews. His

downfall dragged with it the fate of the Jews he had liberated. In land after land, they were hurled back into the slavery from which they had thought themselves emancipated. The promissory notes, written at the threat of war, were repudiated as soon as the danger was past. In Germany, Austria, Russia and Poland, the repressive measures against the Jews became more drastic and intolerable, with heavier burdens of taxation, and with rights still more restricted. Czar Alexander I, who was pictured by the statesman-rabbi as a paragon of virtue, fearing God and loving man, did appoint a "Committee for the Proper Organization of the Jews," but it led to the expulsion of the Jews from the villages, with the result that about 300,000 Jews were set adrift.[39]

Yet, even spiritually, the event which Rabbi Sheneir Zalman dreaded most—the defeat of Napoleon—failed to stem the tide of the times. Between the death of Moses Mendelssohn and Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, a period of twenty-six years elapsed; the change this quarter of a century brought about in the Jewish household became hardened into forms that no power could assail. The reforms that the rabbi feared at the hands of the French emperor were accomplished more effectively by the illustrious hunch-backed philosopher of Berlin. The disciples of Moses Mendelssohn had done more to break down the morale of the old tradition than Napoleon ever contemplated. Liberal ideas had already come to the fore. It was not Napoleon, but the spirit of the new times which made the walls of the old synagogue rattle. Jewish intellectuals, first in Germany, and then in Russia and Poland, were beginning to make violent efforts to modernize their religion. Napoleon's liberalizing influence had only the effect of applying the match to what was already outworn and moldy.

Napoleon's intentions regarding the Jews may be questioned. They may not have been so sincere as many had believed them to be, but the immediate effect of his de-

feat was as disastrous to the world as it was ruinous to the Jews. Had he been spared his retreat from Moscow, there is little doubt but what the Russian people would have been led into paths of freedom and prosperity such as had been opened to the people of France, and the Jews would have been spared some of the most painful chapters in their history. Whatever temporary purpose Sheneir Zalman's gesture may have served, it failed to soften the hearts of the oppressors or induce them to greater leniency to the Jews.

Chapter X

NAHMAN BRATZLAV: POET AND REBEL

The decline of Hassidism was almost as rapid as its rise. But few years since the death of its founder had passed, and it was already on its downward path. There was no dimunition of numbers or enthusiasm, yet its original fire had died out. More than fifty thousand believers are said to have followed the new faith, but it was the husk of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob's belief that they were professing; for, inwardly, Hassidism was exhausted. In an amazingly short time the movement became an instrument of external rites and superstitions, a system of greed and self-seeking. In the hands of unscrupulous demagogues, it became just the opposite of what its founder had intended it to be. Blind believers followed blind leaders, who "wrapped themselves in their prayer-shawls, put on their phylacteries, and prayed all day long, but in reality were nothing more than hypocrites."

Medziboz was only a memory. After the death of Rabbi Dob Baer, Meseritz, too, was forsaken and its followers left to found dynasties of their own. Instead of preserving and extending the kingdom of Rabbi Israel, every one of the Zaddikim was zealously guarding his own little principality against the intrusion of outside rivals. Few men grasped the inner meaning and essence of the new doctrine. No attempt was made to instruct and train new leaders to carry to the future the words and teachings of the Master.

It was a critical time for Hassidism. The faith that had flamed so brightly was reduced to embers, and there

were no hands to fan it into life again. New and enlightened leadership was needed if the movement was to be saved from stagnation and death. The ideal of Rabbi Israel had to be made to live again if his spirit and message were to survive. There was need to start everything from the beginning again; nothing of the dust and ashes of the past could be taken for the rebuilding of the altar. Only a man who was fired with the deepest zeal and devotion could hope to find his way amid so much waste and neglect.

II

It is fortunate for Hassidism that the story of the appearance of such a man can be told. In the history of the Hassidic movement the chapter of Nahman Bratzlav is a parenthesis, for he took his leap ahead alone, not carrying many of his generation with him. His light, like a comet, shone briefly, and passed out as rapidly as it came, but while it lasted its radiance was bright and clear, casting a glow of romance on an otherwise dull and drab age.

Few men felt themselves born to power and leadership as much as he. He was conscious of his own strength and had unlimited confidence in his powers and capacities. "I go upon a way," he said, "where no man has ever passed before," and "all that has been before is as the life within the fruit before it is ripe." [1] Strength of nature, upbringing and an indomitable will contributed to the high and flattering opinion he had of himself. It was a rich heritage of family tradition upon which he entered at his birth; for, in addition to his natural endowments, he was, on his mother's side, the great-grandson of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob. In his soul burned the spirit and idealism of the founder of the faith of which he was to become the foremost poetic expounder. If he fell short of his mission, it was not because nature was niggardly in the bestowal of its gift, but because of the peculiar chain of circumstances that surrounded him from birth to death.

Nahman Bratzlav was born out of his time; he came several generations too soon, as we try to appraise him to-day. He was a giant who found himself living among pigmies; a flaming crusader in a generation that was chained to dead and enslaving traditions. His contemporaries did everything to quench the fire in his heart, to reduce him to their own stature. This resulted in embittering his life and wasting his strength on petty quarrels and controversies. He was a sickly, ailing man, afflicted with a fatal malady probably contracted in his early youth and which made him querulous. In our own time history has suddenly restored him. With the exception of Rabbi Israel, more has been written about him than about all the other Hassidic leaders. Though this may not be an infallible proof of his eminence, it proves at least that this man impressed himself upon the modern mind as the most original and picturesque figure of the Hassidim of his time.

If Hassidism is at all remembered to-day and, despite its decadence there is a revived interest in the fading sect of two hundred years ago, no little credit is due to this strange and remarkable man, whose very failings spread a halo over his life. If he did not reach the goal or blaze the trails on which he set out, the world will remember him for those wondrously charming stories and parables which still find their way to thousands of hearts, and for which his name will be held in lasting love and gratitude.

Nahman was born not in a haze of glory, but during the days that marked the darkest despair of the movement he was destined to lead. The storms that accompanied him through his life broke at his very birth. It was in the month of Nissan, 5532 (1772), the very year in which Dob Baer died and the ban against Hassidism was published that he saw the light of the world. The prayers for a leader, which must have been loud in those days, seemed as though they had been answered by his birth. Outwardly inauspicious as the hour of his birth

may have been, fortune did not neglect him in other respects. On his father's and mother's side he was descended of a family unique in the history of Hassidism. His father, Simha, a pious though simple-hearted man, serving as a cantor in one of the synagogues in Medziboz, was the son of Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka, a pupil of Rabbi Israel, and a descendant of a long line of rabbis and scholars. His mother, Feige, was the daughter of Baal Shem Tob's only female child, Udel, a woman of unusual ability and understanding. It is also of no small importance that Medziboz was the place of Nahman's birth. Although at the time he was born, much of its former glory had already departed, the spirit of the man who made it famous still hovered over it sufficiently to enter into the very blood of the newly arisen leader of the Hassidic sect.

III

From his grandsire Nahman inherited not only his glowing faith, but many of his other characteristics as well. Like Baal Shem Tob he was endowed with a sensitive and poetic temperament. He loved nature with that deep and passionate love which made him regard every flower and blade of grass as though they possessed living souls. He attributed sensations of joy and pain to them as though they were human beings and personally felt their hurt. Thus, when he spent one night in a log hut which was made of freshly hewn trees, he complained that he could not sleep, for he thought that he heard the moanings of the trees that had been cut down in their prime.

He loved the natural scenery of the town in which he was born—its brooks and meadows, its wooded hills, and spent many of the most refreshing hours of his childhood in their midst. Their beauty bewitched him; it filled his heart; it captivated his soul; it entranced his whole being. As often as he could he would steal away from his youth-

ful companions and wander alone amid the rustic scenes of the village. He would ride out on a horse, or navigate by boat the stream that flowed by the town. Trees and flowers were to him living objects; he talked to them as though they were human beings and understood his words. They were also shrines and temples to him at whose altar he poured out his most fervent prayers. They were not the ritual prayers of the synagogue, but free and spontaneous ejaculations which poured out of his overflowing heart. Coming not from books but from his ecstatic nature, they were phrased in whatever words happened to come to his lips. Loving hands afterwards collected these prayer utterances, and they are among the gems of devotional literature.

Unlike Rabbi Israel, Nahman displayed from his earliest childhood an almost insatiable hunger for knowledge. He learned to read almost as soon as he learned to talk, and absorbed greedily all that the local teaching talents could give him. His curriculum was wide and liberal, covering almost the entire field of Hebrew literature. In addition to Bible and Talmud he also familiarized himself with the works of the ethical writers which he found particularly pleasing to his taste. He fitted himself up a room in the garret of his father's house, where he spent many days and nights in meditating upon the words of the Torah. He was hungry for knowledge and was not satisfied with the regular hours of instruction. He gave his teachers whatever savings he possessed to make them stay a little while longer and explain to him another page in the books he was studying. His diligence was amply rewarded; for at the age of thirteen, when he was Bar Mitzvah,[2] he was already proclaimed as a new star that had arisen in Israel.

IV

It was inevitable that he should early fall under the spell of the Kabbalah, for Medziboz was thick with it.

The whole population of the city seemed to live under the influence of tense religious excitement. It was an atmosphere which was created by the founder of Hassidism and the leaders who followed him. The influence of his parents, the memory of his great-grandfather, and of his two uncles, brothers of his mother, of Ephraim, the gentle author of *Degel Mahne Ephraim,* "The Banner of the Camp of Ephraim," and of Barukh, the titular head of the Hassidic sect, a vain and boastful man, eager for power and contemptuous of his contemporary fellow Zaddikim, had the effect of fanning into a flame whatever innate inclination to mysticism he may have had.

His soul, athirst for new and untrodden paths, made him long for a greater knowledge of God and the Torah than the books he was studying could give him. Nahman steeped himself in the Kabbalah; was fascinated by the new world it disclosed and felt that a fresh light was breaking in upon him. The Bible, the Talmud, and the other books he was studying, assumed a new meaning; many of their mystifying pages now became clear to him. It was a torch that set his heart aflame. Of a vivid and imaginative nature, the Kabbalah revealed to him realms of romance and poetry which satisfied his eager and fantastic mind. He also listened with enthusiasm to the stories the Hassidim told of the Zaddikim, and they regaled and inspired him, for he regarded them as outward garments concealing deep and holy thoughts. They were the first intimations of an art of which he was later to become the leading exponent. All his life Nahman never wearied of telling of the influence that these wonder-tales had had upon him and the faith and wisdom he derived from them.[3]

He not only accepted the doctrinal Kabbalah, but also its practical discipline of fasts and penances. His ancestor would not have approved of his ascetic life, but it was a different world into which he was born, a world of

corruption and self-seeking, in which the pristine truths of the Master had been degraded to their lowest level. Hassidism, he felt, had sinned by leaning too much to the worldly side of life, thereby making religion too easy for its followers. As a result, it was almost on the point of collapse. Even when he was but six years old he envied the grown-up folks the fervor and enthusiasm of their prayers and longed for the time when he would emulate their example.

V

At a time when most children begin to feel their first thrill of life, Nahman was already a full-grown Kabbalist, systematically following all the demands and practices of the mystical science. To snap the bonds that chained him to his physical life was his leading ambition, and he embarked upon a course that would accomplish it. He engaged in long and uninterrupted fasts, often lasting from one Sabbath to the other, and when he broke it, he would gulp down his food so as not to derive any pleasure from it. He spent many days in solitude, not even showing himself in the synagogue, performing his devotions privately with ecstatic fervor and copious tears.

He also paid frequent visits to the grave of his great-grandfather, Rabbi Israel, where he would remain for many hours at a time. For a number of years it was his favorite place of prayer. He went there both in summer and in winter. Blistering heat did not deter him, nor could excessive cold discourage his visits to the shrine. Long after night had come he would still be found bending over the tomb, and falling snow did not rouse him from his reflections. His meditations on these occasions were long, convulsive and exhausting, and he would stumble back to his home weak and spent.[4]

He lived the strenuous and exacting life of the Kabbalist, but he did not find its severest demands too hard to execute. To carry out his daily ritual ablutions he had

often to break through the cover of ice which formed on the surface of the Mikvah.[5] It was perhaps the most trying of all his Kabbalistic exercises, but he discharged it with an undaunted spirit. He returned from the purification rite, cold and shivering, with icicles dangling from his beard and side locks. It was a furious and dangerous life that he was living, utterly heedless of the price he would one day have to pay for it. The day of reckoning came sooner than was feared, for it was as a result of one of these exposures that he contracted a cold which gave rise to a tubercular malady. This wrecked his health and ultimately hastened his death.[6]

Although otherwise of a cheerful disposition, it sometimes seemed to Nahman that God had hidden his face from him, rejected his prayers, not deeming him worthy to become the instrument of His will and purpose. These were the hours of his greatest pain and suffering. Days of weeping and self-abasement would follow such periods of depression. He often hid himself under the benches of the little synagogue of Rabbi Israel, where the worshipers would find him in the morning with his eyes swollen from tears.[7] When he was in this state of mind his visits to the grave of his great-grandfather became more frequent and, like a child pleading with his father, he would pray to him for direction and guidance.

At other times, again, a great calm would come over him. It was the time when it seemed to him that God had listened to his prayers and the voice of the Master was calling to him from the grave. It was then that he felt strong and confident; an unconquerable faith in himself and his mission entered his being. Ideas and intimations of his future work were already forming in his mind and he found his powers equal to the task.

VI

Nahman was married not many years after his Bar Mitzvah. He was a match worthy of any rich man's

daughter, for he had ancestry and learning, the two distinctions prized highest in those days, on his side. His fiancée, whom he neither met nor conversed with until the wedding day, was the daughter of a wealthy business man of Husyatin, and he went to live with her parents, as was the custom in those days. Marriage did not change the habits of his life, and he threw himself upon his books with even greater devotion than before, giving them the attention that he owed his young wife. In those days wives did not mind such neglect on the part of their husbands; it did not interfere with their domestic felicity. On the contrary, they were supremely happy in the sacrifice they were making, for they regarded it as their contribution to the cultivation of the Torah.

Whatever time he could spare from his books, he shared with the wooded haunts of the village where he was now living, for the love of nature, cultivated in his youth, grew with the advancing years. He had a keen and observant eye, an imagination which related everything with God. Rabbi Israel discovered God in nature, but it was Rabbi Nahman who made it the foundation of his whole faith.

Looking at life through the prism of nature, everything assumed for him a different form. He saw the current of life flowing through all things. He saw the Living Glory encompassing all creation, concealed, yet present. Everything in nature bore the stamp of divine life. Things may change and stagnate, but they cannot lose their vital force. "Everything," he said, "lives, grows, rises and praises God." When passing, one winter's day, a field that was covered with snow and ice, he stopped and fell into a reverie. "All grasses and plants are dead now, but at the approach of the summer they shall live again, and each blade of grass will hymn a song unto God. How pleasant it is to listen to their song." [8] There were poets who rhapsodized nature, and philosophers who contemplated it to the point of deification, but there are few

hearts that responded to it with the ecstatic and unaffected joy of Nahman Bratzlav.

VII

Nahman was a man of nerves. Action, movement, the restless, vivid and assertive life were what he needed and wanted. He roused himself from his musings and surveyed the task that was before him. He pondered over the problems of Hassidism and the factors that contributed to its weakness and decay, and found that it was suffering from an astonishing complication of diseases. Its spiritual power had waned; its oracles were dumb; the unity of the sect was shattered; there was not even the pretense of a single head, each community following its own interests, and deciding for itself which Zaddik to follow. The faith which was hewn from Rabbi Israel's own heart, degenerated into a temporal organization for dispensing power and patronage. He saw outward piety and inward insincerity; hypocrites, enthroned in the seat of Zaddikim, fattening on the sweat and toil of simple-hearted believers. He saw the external rites of Hassidism carried out with pomp and ceremony, its inner substance dead; impotent and helpless leaders doing nothing to instruct the sin-burdened multitudes that "looked up, but were not fed." There were several eminent and holy men in that generation, but their time was so taken up either with repulsing the attack of the enemy or with caring for the salvation of their own souls that they found no time for the spiritual needs of the masses.

He was young, only twenty-six, when he decided to save what he could from the remnants of the movement. The road he had chosen was long and difficult, but he did not flinch from the task. He conceived a high sense of his own importance and often spoke of himself in flattering terms, which strangely contrasted with the value he set on modesty. He would build and not repeat, create and not duplicate. "I shall make a path through the desert land.

I shall hew down the trees, one by one, which have stood in the way for thousands of years, so that the path shall be passable." He felt himself alone in the great work before him. "I am," he said, "like the man who wanders in a wilderness and seeks to find a way." [9]

He would take nothing of the old material for the rebuilding of the temple, not even the example of Rabbi Israel and the Zaddikim who followed him. "They build," he said, "according to their light, but their work passed with them. The emotions they stirred up in the hearts of their disciples did not last for many generations, but ended with their death." [10] There must be new ways and new methods. The "false prophets" must be driven from their enthroned authority, their places taken by men who are filled with the spirit of consecration. The accumulated impurities must be purged and, in a declaration strangely reminiscent of the supreme self-confidence of another religious reformer of an earlier day, he cried out: "I am the river which cleanses all impurities." [11]

What were the new methods that Nahman announced with the startling effect of a new revelation? They are the same simple methods employed by Rabbi Israel and his successor, Dob Baer—the need of "training disciples who, in turn, would train other disciples to carry the faith and teachings of Hassidism to the distant generations." [12] Not only the Hassidim, but the broad masses of the people, must be filled with such a complete and thorough understanding of the principles of the new faith that they will transmit the fire of their conviction to other hearts. It was not a static but dynamic Hassidism that he demanded; not a dormant and inactive religion, but one that should contain within itself the possibilities of self-perpetuation.

One can feel the militant, missionary spirit of a religious apostle burning in his words. He had the preparation and ideal equipment for the exacting work that his missionary ambition demanded. He was an enthusiast, a

poet, a man gifted with a vivid imagination and large vision, and, as an expert in the higher subtleties of Jewish learning, he could meet and vanquish the arguments of the foremost scholars of his generation. He was also conscious of the narrowness of Hassidism which, he felt, had to be broadened and liberalized before it could meet the test of a universal appeal.

VIII

Nahman left his retirement and went about preaching his message to all those who were ready for it. Husyatin soon proved to be an inappropriate place for the reception of his gospel. Therefore he settled with his family in the neighboring village of Medvedevka. Here he organized a local brotherhood and laid the foundation for the teaching of the faith which was in his heart. His piety and burning enthusiasm attracted a considerable following who proclaimed him as their leader. He lived in dire poverty, maintaining himself on the small pension from his father-in-law. When, at the latter's impoverishment, this source of supply gave out, his followers made up a modest weekly purse which, by the exercise of stringent economy, was barely sufficient to keep him and his family above want. All of this time, however, he went about preparing the ground for the work he had in mind.

He was in need of some stirring, self-renewing experience, an illumination of the soul to set his heart aflame. There was no lack of courage or determination, but he needed that inward, warming glow to quicken his faculties before starting out on his mission. He thought that a visit to the Holy Land would supply the spark. All the eminent teachers of Hassidism had preached an ecstatic love for Palestine. The master of Meseritz, who did not live in Palestine himself, taught that "Zion is the life of all countries, and each country takes its physical and spiritual existence from its part in the Holy Land," [18] Menạ-

hem Mendel of Vitebsk rhapsodized Palestine as "the Shekhinah itself." To understand Hassidism, they taught, one must breathe the air of the Holy Land.

To Nahman Palestine became the object of his deepest love and veneration, a dream that colored and affected his tenderest yearnings and emotions. Not even the winged words of Rabbi Judah Halevi compare with the sentiments that the Holy Land aroused in the emotions of this youthful enthusiast. For many years he carried the love of the land within him. It became part of him long before his feet touched its soil. He was spiritually at one with it, although the details of the journey were still to be arranged. He lived Palestine in his dreams; it stayed with him in his waking hours; there was not an endearing epithet that he did not lavish upon it. "The absolute fountain of wisdom and reason is found in Palestine." "There a man can attain to the highest degree, to be like Him, praised be his name." "Whosoever wishes to be a true Jew, must go to Palestine," and "Palestine and the Torah, they are one."

It was on a Passover day when his friends and disciples first got to know of the resolution in his heart. He first whispered it to them on his way from the Mikvah, and elaborated upon it in several of his discourses. They tried to dissuade him, pleaded with him and pointed to the hardships and dangers of so long a journey. Above all, they argued, they could not endure the thought of such a long separation from the master who had just revealed himself to them. Rabbi Nahman listened to their pleas but remained firm. They could not prevail upon him to change his plans, since the best part of him was already in Palestine.

More touching was the appeal of his family. When his intentions became known to them, there was fear and sorrow. They were poor; they were alone; there was considerable danger on the way. Her own pleas having failed, his wife sent her daughter to beg the father to

have pity on his children, but he remained obdurate. He was a tender father and a kind and considerate husband, but felt that he could not stultify his soul for the sake of his family. It was not indifference to the needs of his wife and children, but the consciousness of his high calling which made him harden his heart to their petitions. He told his wife to hire herself out as a cook, and his children to find places as servants, or accept the hospitality of whomsoever would take pity on them, but, as for himself, he would sell whatever he could turn into money and start out on his journey.[14]

IX

He traveled poor, but took along with him an attendant who was willing to share his poverty and hardships. They journeyed incognito and kept the purpose of their pilgrimage secret. They went by way of Odessa and Stamboul and were obliged to wait in the latter city for several weeks before they could procure passage for Palestine. The adventures of Rabbi Nahman had been described in Hassidic literature as supernatural; a special treatise, *Massath Ha-Yam,* "The Sea Voyage," was devoted to this subject. Even when many of its surrounding legends and miracles are discounted, the trip was not uneventful, as was true of every journey of such distance in the days when traveling facilities were few and rare. The sea was often angry, as though signifying its disapproval of the rabbi's purpose. He lay on the deck of the boat groaning and helpless, an object of pity and contempt to his fellow passengers.

In Constantinople he conducted himself in a strange and unconventional manner, often appearing in the streets barefooted and without headgear, except for the cap which always covered his skull. Turkey was then at war with France, and his strange conduct gave rise to suspicions of espionage. He would have been detained and deported had he not been able to prove that he was a

poor pilgrim on the way to the Holy Land. He met emissaries from Palestine who were collecting funds for the Jewish community in that country. They did not suspect his identity but thought he was going to the Holy Land to arouse the antagonism of its Jews against Abraham of Kalisk, who was then engaged in a controversy with Rabbi Sheneir Zalman of Ladi. They quarrelled and offended him.

He stayed in Constantinople longer than he expected, but at last he succeeded in booking passage for Palestine. The troubles that he thought were now at an end were only just beginning, for his boat became tangled up with the fleet of France and it was in danger of being captured and sunk. If hardships are the test of every holy mission, Nahman had his share of them. After endless difficulties, he arrived at Haifa on the eve of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) in the year 1799.

The rumor of his arrival soon spread and the visiting rabbi was received with honor and ceremony. There was a sizeable Jewish community of Hassidim in the Holy Land. The ground for his work was laid by Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, who presided over the Hassidic community for twenty years. After his death, the leadership fell into the hands of the able and energetic, though militant, Abraham of Kalisk.

No such event as the coming to Palestine of the great-grandson of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob could pass unnoticed. Communities therefore vied with one another to do him honor. Rabbi Nahman was by this time no longer unknown in his own right, the reports of his reputation having reached as far as the East. Delegation after delegation came to invite him to spend the Holy Days in one city or another, but, intent upon solitude and contemplation, he declined these advances. His visit to the Holy Land was to him a spiritual honeymoon; he wished to be alone with the object of his love, undisturbed by the prying eyes of outsiders.

X

The effect of his visit to Palestine was overwhelming. He felt himself swept away by an emotion such as he had not known before. He was intoxicated by everything he saw; his fondest dream had been realized. The land had never been as great and holy as it appeared to the young poet, saint and mystic. He lived as though in a trance, isolating himself from his friends and the fellow Zaddikim who were anxious to do him honor. He could not bring himself to breathe the atmosphere of the country for fear that he was not worthy of it. Hassidim came to him, eager for a new and refreshing word from the descendant of Baal Shem Tob, but his emotions proved too strong for words. Leading and learned men came to him, but they fared no better. It is told that he was one day on the point of revealing a novel interpretation of a passage in the Torah, but, overpowered by emotion, the words stuck in his throat and he could not go on.[15] So affected was he by his contact with the country that, not being able to stand the strain any longer, he would have returned to his home shortly after were it not for the importunities of his friends who prevailed upon him to master his feelings and remain a little while longer in the country.

He visited the graves of Tiberias and Safed and gained new knowledge of the teachings of the masters of the Kabbalah. His brief stay in Palestine was not without its beneficial effect upon the Jews of the country, for he brought fresh life and courage to the small Hassidic colony and ironed out many of the disputes and quarrels among them. Not only the Hassidim, but also their opponents felt themselves quickened by his personality. He succeeded in winning them over to a friendlier and more sympathetic attitude to the movement. He conducted himself modestly with his fellow Zaddikim and a strong bond of intimacy developed between them.

Rabbi Nahman was a noted letter-writer. The epistolary art was developed by him to a high point of perfection. It was his way of recording the fleeting moods and emotions of the moment and his output is said to have been enormous. But his letters from Palestine to the friends and followers he left behind are particularly attractive for their tenderness and intimacy. He tells them of the wonder and magic of the Holy Land and the great love and peace which had come into his life. Every day makes his love for Palestine deeper and tenderer; the longer he tarries the greater his enthusiasm and affection for the country. He also tells them how they, his disciples, are close to his heart, and how the physical distance between them only makes his love for them all the more real. If not for the spiritual union with them he would have prolonged his stay in the Holy Land, for it possessed his whole heart.

XI

After an absence of less than one year, Nahman returned to the place of his residence. In reality he never left Palestine, for it stayed with him all the days of his life. "Wherever I go," he said, "I am in Palestine." [16] Palestine was in and around him. It was in his blood and in the inward essence of his being. He could not look away from it; his thoughts ever wandered back to it. He regarded everything that went on in his life before as useless and futile, "as the life within the fruit before it is ripe." He attributed all he had achieved, whether in learning or in piety, to the influence of the Holy Land. "Whatever holiness I possess," he said, "comes because of my contact with Palestine," [17] and "all the knowledge I have gained before as though it were nothing." He conceived of the Holy Land as the spiritual center that nourishes and sustains the Jews in all the lands of their exile. The very bread of Palestine had for him a more

pleasing taste than the bread of other lands.[18] When his disciples endeavored to interpret his love for Palestine symbolically, he rebuked them and said, "No, it is the real Palestine I mean, with its houses and streets, as we see it with the human eye." [19]

In his collection of prayers there are many touching and tender yearnings for the land of Israel, but the following, uttered before his visit to the Holy Land, may be taken as a classic for its elegance and simplicity: "Make me and thy people, Israel, worthy, in the abundance of thy mercy, that we sincerely, genuinely and earnestly yearn to come to the Land of Israel; and grant me the strength and resolution that I should realize this craving of my heart. Thou alone knowest how great is my need of the land, because of the distractions, confusions and imperfections which beset my life and removed me far from thee. Therefore, my heart yearns and hungers for the land which is the source and fountain of our holy faith." [20]

No greater love for the country than Rabbi Nahman felt for Palestine, had any man. It was a mystic love which was bound up with the tenderest ties of his ecstatic heart. He no sooner had come back than he longed to return to Palestine, but the condition of his health and the circumstances in which he became involved, prevented him from carrying out his wish.

XII

There is a dualism in the character of Rabbi Nahman which is hard to explain. He is perhaps the most interesting example of a divided personality anywhere to be found. Inconsistency is one of the strangest characteristics of the man. He who emphasized the virtue of modesty was himself the most boastful of Hassidic leaders. While teaching humility, he practiced self-flattery; the meekness he demanded of others, was fol-

lowed by a high appraisal he formed of himself. It was one of the souvenirs that he brought with him from his visit to the Holy Land.

Rabbi Nahman carried away from Palestine a consciousness of his superior powers, and wrote and spoke of himself in high and exalted terms. He became obsessed with an exaggerated estimate of himself and took little trouble to conceal it. "The true Zaddikim," he said, "are filled in Palestine with a heavenly wisdom"; as for himself, mysteries had been revealed to him on the sea that had not been revealed to the masters of the Talmud. "I am like unto a beautiful tree whose branches and foliage are fresh and green," [21] and to a brother Zaddik he remarked, "I want to bless you that you should understand my ordinary, everyday speech, in the world to come." [22]

He regarded himself as the only true and worthy guide, the like of whom had never arisen, and believed his powers to equal those of the Messiah who would descend from him.[23] He recognized no human teacher, tracing his wisdom and saintliness directly to the influence of the Holy Spirit.[24] Not only was his wisdom like the wisdom of God, but, like Him, he possessed the faculty of reviving the dead.[25] He did not hesitate to compare himself with the ranking men in Jewish history, and sometimes even claimed superiority to them. "Since the Jews," he said, "were driven into exile, there have been four great periods of learning, at each of which stood a chosen one, and these are the four chosen teachers: Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, Rabbi Isaac Luria, Rabbi Israel and Rabbi Nahman." [26] In his pride and self-esteem, he set himself above all the other Zaddikim, and said that he alone possessed the power of raising the world from its mire to God.

The superlative estimate he had formed of himself was coupled with a belittling opinion of contemporary Zad-

dikim. He often spoke and wrote of them in harsh and bitter terms, not even sparing his own great-grandfather. He who in his youth spent many days at his grave, was now disdainful of the help he could derive from him. When his mother suggested to him to visit Rabbi Israel's tomb, he answered, "If he wants me, let him come to me." [27] When, making preparations to start on a journey to a distant city, one of his Hassidim asked him whether he intended to recover the manuscripts of Rabbi Israel which were thought to be concealed there, he replied, "I have no need of them any longer." [28]

Irreverent as he was toward the memory of his own great-grandfather, one could not expect any more respect for the Zaddikim who followed him. Unsparing in his condemnation of them, he laid at their door all the sins and evils that afflicted his generation. He mimicked their piety, parodied their virtues, and held up to scorn their pride and vanity. He accused them of ignorance, stupidity, spiritual blindness and hypocrisy. "Many," he said, "call themselves 'Rabbi,' but they have no power to control themselves and others, and yet they aspire to lead the world." [29] Rabbi Nahman lanced the wounds of the Zaddikim and was not careful of the scalpel he used. He censured the leaders of his time and exposed their supposed wickedness and corruption. He did not mention them by name, but the concealment was flimsy. The age and popular esteem in which the Zaddikim he attacked were held was no protection against the sharpness of his satire. In fact, it was the popular and celebrated Zaddikim who were subjected to the most cutting of his onslaughts. Thus, he said, "Not all who are famous are true. There is many a hypocrite and scoundrel who rides upon the crest of popular approval." Perhaps his most acrid shaft was: "When Satan saw that it was difficult to lead all the world astray, he appointed such men as the Zaddikim in various places to help him in his work." [30]

XIII

It was but to be expected that his boastfulness and critical view of his contemporaries would not improve his standing in the estimation of his fellow Zaddikim. They saw danger lurking in the wake of his attack. He was teaching a doctrine of Zaddikism which threatened to undermine their authority and influence over their believers. The position they held in their communities was being seriously menaced by him. Superficial men saw nothing but vanity in the exaggerated claims he was making for himself, and they were unsparing in their attack and persecution. They preferred charges against him, accusing him of many sins. He was pronounced a rebel, a heretic, a renegade, one who was harboring a new and dangerous doctrine. Even secret affiliation with the sect of Sabbatai Zebi and Jacob Frank was attributed to him, besides listing many other grievances.

The enemies of Nahman succeeded in rousing the ire of Rabbi Loeb, popularly known as the "Sage of Shpola," a venerable, though simple-hearted and easily aroused old man, who was induced to proceed against him with all the might and authority of his influence. "Curse Nahman," said the "Sage of Shpola," to one of his followers, "and I will assure you of your portion in the world to come." [81]

The controversy was long and bitter; it spread like wildfire all over the empire of Hassidimdom, his adversaries trying to enlist influential men against him. The most venerated Hassidic leader of the time, who, by reason of his age, learning and saintliness enjoyed the love and respect of all the groups, was Rabbi Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev. When the quarrel reached his ears, and attempts were made to secure his approval for the excommunication of Nahman, he not only refused to join his adversaries, but even said: "Were I to know that my voice would be listened to, I would cry out from one end of the

world to the other, and proclaim that he who wants to be a just and upright man and serve God in truth, should follow the great and holy Rabbi Nahman." [32]

XIV

Although he felt the keenness of the attack, he was not moved by it, nor did he lay down his arms. Instead of pacifying his opponents, he continued to teach his doctrine to the small group of friends and followers who gathered about him. In fact, his self-confidence fed on the opposition it encountered. "How can they help quarrelling with me?" he asked. "Have I not chosen a road which has never been trodden by any man before?" [33] He regarded the charges against him as soil in which the seeds of his teachings would mature and grow. He was paving a new way, while the others were proceeding on the path of blind custom and tradition. "The seeds," he said, "which are placed in the earth must first rot and become decomposed before they can germinate into life and produce a harvest." [34]

As though to irritate and confound his antagonists, he continued to speak of himself in even more boastful terms than before. He attributed the highest merit to his teachings, and said, "The joy of understanding my doctrine is sufficient to make up for the lack of food and drink." [35] He considered himself the founder of a new era. Rabbi Nahman was convinced of the abiding value of his teachings and was content to remain for the while misunderstood and unhonored. If, he said, his doctrine had been revealed in the days of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai or Isaac Luria, it would have created a new epoch, for his wisdom came from the same source as the wisdom of Moses and the Torah.[36]

Satisfied though Nahman may have been with himself, the almost universal antagonism that was aroused against him came down on his followers with crushing effect. They were made to pay the full penalty for the unpop-

ularity in which their teacher and his doctrine were held. Disdaining to wreak their vengeance against their adversary alone, his opponents were determined to stamp out the heresy wherever they found it. They consequently turned against his friends and followers and made them bear the full brunt of their wrath. They were persecuted; they were hunted; they were made to share every shame and humiliation that could be heaped upon them. Even their business and family life was not spared the sharpness of their vengeance. Social and commercial intercourse with them was forbidden, and their sons and daughters were declared unfit for association. Their slaughterhouses were proclaimed as ritually unclean, their synagogues desecrated, and their religious leaders without binding authority. As though stricken with some horrible malady, every communion with their fellow Jews was cut off to them.

Yet such was their devotion and loyalty to their teacher that they were willing to endure their suffering in silence and continue to cling to him. But the leader saw their afflictions and took pity on them. He did not wish to hold himself any further responsible for the sorrow which, through his presence in their midst had befallen them, and decided to remove the stigma under which they were laboring by leaving the town and settling in some other community. The resolution was made not without considerable pain, for Medvedevka was the scene of his ripening talents, where his first followers were recruited. Yet he felt it to be a duty he owed to the men who were innocently suffering on his account. He therefore took up his staff once more, and, leaving the town of his triumphs and sufferings, settled in Bratzlav.

Chapter XI

MYSTIC AND STORY-TELLER

Great moments in the history of religions have dated from the flight of their leaders. Moses fled from Egypt and discovered the Burning Bush. The whole East was changed by the flight of Mohammed from Mecca. Almost driven out from Medvedevka, Rabbi Nahman took flight to Bratzlav. The most romantic chapter in Hassidism took its rise from this event.

There was nothing that Nahman needed more than peace and tranquillity. His strenuous life was beginning to show its effects upon him. He was rapidly becoming an old man, not in years, but in suffering; his path was lonely and encompassed with danger; unless he could find hope in his own heart, his future seemed hopeless. He was without friends and lived almost in isolation, except for the small circle of followers to whom he brought nothing but misfortune. He was weary of unending friction, weary of self-torment, and his spirit was becoming dejected within him. He needed a respite from the forces of hostility and antagonism which surrounded him before his waning strength and energy were completely spent.

Bratzlav afforded him this. It was an old town in Podolia dating back to the fourteenth century, with a Jewish community of considerable size. There were no inherited Hassidic traditions in the city and no such spiritual hegemony as was exercised by the Zaddikim in other communities. While Hassidism was strongly favored by its population, it owed allegiance to no particular Hassidic group.

When one considers that the whole ministration of

Rabbi Nahman in Bratzlav did not exceed five years and that a good part of this time was taken up with his illness and frequent journeys abroad to regain his failing health, one must marvel at the amount of work he managed to crowd into this comparatively short space of time. The few years of relief from persecution he enjoyed there seem to have proved sufficient to sharpen his talents to the keenest edge. He recruited from the population of Bratzlav a group of followers who were made up of intelligent and spiritually alert young people eager to follow their enthusiastic leader.

II

There was no greater satisfaction he knew than his enthusiasm for youth. Although matured by suffering and experience, he was only thirty years old. He had never known the company of young men; all his life was spent among people much older than himself. His soul rebelled against old age, which he considered the symbol of death and decay. "I cannot bear," he cries out, "to see always old men around me; it is not good to be old. . . . We must renew ourselves each day. We must refresh our minds, for, when we refresh our minds, we refresh our souls too, for the mind is the soul." [1]

He loved the freshness and eagerness of youth, its free and adventurous spirit. He was himself like the young people who surrounded him; his soul as eager and restless as theirs. He never allowed his mind to become inactive. He was never satisfied to remain on the same spiritual level, *Madregah,* but always reached out for the higher realms. Rest and inaction were to him the symbols of spiritual impotence and his prayers are full of almost pathetic petitions to keep his mind fresh and young. "The world," he said, "does not rest even for a moment; God is continually at work, as is said, 'He reneweth every day the work of creation.' " [2] "Every forward step a man takes creates an angel who raises him higher to God."

The young people who gathered about him quickly learned to love, almost worship, their new leader in whom they discovered a spirit akin to theirs. And he knew how to gain and hold their love. He possessed his great-grandfather's gift of winning the trust and confidence of those who came under his spell. He surrounded them with his influence and breathed his very soul into them. He shared their life, made them partners in his Torah, and when on a journey, he wrote to them, "Each one of you has a place in my heart." When in doubt he strengthened them; when they were weak and stumbled, he led them by the hand and lifted their cares. "I will do penance for you," he said, "I can make good again all that you have spoiled." When they felt themselves assailed by religious fears, he relieved their anxiety in these words, "Why should you worry? Give me the bricks and mortar, and I shall build for you beautiful temples." [3] He exemplified in his own life and conduct the ideal of the Zaddik he was preaching.

III

Unlike the Zaddikim of his day, who were not insensitive to the glitter of gold, Rabbi Nahman not only lived poorly but rhapsodized poverty as a badge of honor. Money had no attraction for him; the credentials of wealth conferred no distinction in his eyes. "Money," he said, "leads to idolatry and the truly pious man takes no part in the chase for riches." In a memorable passage he dwells upon the enslaving effect of gold and severely castigates those who worship at its shrine: "They are always in debt, slaves to their desires and ambitions, and slaves to others. Would it not be better if they turned away from their idols of gold and silver and learned to serve God?" [4] "When the rays of the sun," said Nahman Bratzlav, "enter a house through a dusty window, they form illumined pillars. But if one tries to feel them, he finds that there is nothing there. Worldly desires are

comparable to these imaginary pillars fashioned by the sun. They are deceptive and without substance." [4a]

He took a fatherly interest in the spiritual and material conditions of his people. In order to familiarize himself with their daily affairs, he spent much time in traveling and visiting the surrounding towns and villages of his community. He would not disclose the purpose of these visits, but surrounded them with mystery. When he was asked by one of his disciples, he said, "If people knew the purpose of my journeyings, they would kiss the very steps of my feet." [5]

But Rabbi Nahman was not a traveling mendicant who held out his hand for God's pennies. He was interested only in the spiritual condition of the people he visited and refused to accept the gifts that were offered to him. "I derive," he said, "my greatest pleasure when I find among those who follow me a genuine love of Judaism and a sincere desire to serve God." A man not of this world, he was sincerely hurt when he was asked to pray for the gifts of the earth, angrily reproaching such advances, "I cannot understand," he said, "how you can distract my mind with petitions for such trifles. I am like the man who day and night is wandering in a desert seeking to convert it into a habitable place. Is not the condition of your souls like the desert where there is no room for God? Now, it is my task to restore your hearts so that God may find a dwelling therein." [6]

With all his love of men and his desire to have them always around him, he was never able to overcome his preference for seclusion. He often supplicated God for the gift of solitude. "Make me worthy," he prayed, "to live in solitude so that I may completely abnegate myself." [7] He loved to recall the lonely hours he spent amid the rustic scenes of his childhood. He possessed the gift of being able to surround himself with an atmosphere of seclusion even when his friends were swarming about him. It is no exaggeration to say that he was always

alone, even when visitors crowded to his door. He taught his pupils the value of privacy, and, like Mohammed and other religious leaders, would retire into solitude and silence.

Rabbi Nahman was a lover of his people. His own sufferings did not quench the passion of his devotion to them. He was never conscious of their imperfections and shortcomings but saw only their virtues and holiness and implanted that love in the hearts of his disciples. The Jews were to him the heart and vital impulse of the world from whom radiates all that is true and good and beautiful. Not even the least of Jews is to be despised for he is endowed with a sufficient supply of "sparks" to be able to lift him to God again. The love of Israel fills many of his prayers, in one of which he petitions the Deity: "Make me worthy to seek and find good points in every individual Jew, even in the most unworthy of them, so that, because of the virtue of their goodness, the kingdom of evil may be annulled from the world." [8]

IV

All his life Rabbi Nahman laid claim to the novelty of his faith and doctrine. It was his boastfulness of originality which provoked the greatest anger and opposition of his enemies. He loved to pose as an innovator and was hounded and persecuted as such. He set up the most extravagant claims for himself and was disdainful of all his contemporaries. At the very beginning of his career he declared that he had to start everything anew. He was dissatisfied with the Hassidim of his time and did little to conceal his dissatisfaction. He censured and criticized their work and was not sparing even of the greatest of his predecessors. With a haughty contempt for their work he proclaimed himself, "I have come to point to the new way." But what was his way? What was the doctrine he preached, or the methods he followed which should entitle him to the claim of novelty?

Those who hope to find in his writings some bold and daring pronouncement will be doomed to disappointment. He promised much more than he gave; the expectation is larger than the fulfillment. While he tore down much that was old, he failed to build up anything new. Two conflicting emotions seemed to have been struggling within his heart. While he was on the one hand a revolutionary, a rebel, filled with the flaming zeal of the reformer, he was at the same time chained to a system of traditions and superstitions which he was powerless to overcome. Excessively individual in some respects, he was surprisingly conforming in other things. A rebel to the point of martyrdom against the excesses of Zaddikism, he taught a doctrine of beliefs and practices which did not materially differ from the teachings of his contemporary Hassidim.

V

Although he gave himself the airs of a philosopher, philosophy was regarded by him with mistrust and suspicion. If he was at all acquainted with the works of the Jewish philosophers, he certainly succeeded in hiding the fact. He often inveighed against the works of the Jewish thinkers, but he knew them more by reputation than by actual knowledge. He was disrespectful to Maimonides and spoke harshly of the other rationalist philosophers. Of the former's principal philosophical work, he said, "He who looks into the *Moreh* loses the divine image of his being." [9] Referring to the same author he says in a passage of one of his unpublished works: "There are some men who pass to-day for great philosophers, but in the world to come it will be made known that they were in reality nothing more than heretics and unbelievers." [10] Bitter as he was against the Zaddikim, he was equally merciless in his treatment of the men who passed as philosophers. He held philosophy responsible for confusing

the mind of the plain and ordinary man and leading him away from the path of true faith.

It is not surprising that the early Haskalah enthusiasts could hope for little encouragement at his hands. He saw nothing but danger in the new winds that were blowing across the Jewish horizon and was particularly outspoken against the rationalist school that arose in the wake of the pioneers of the new enlightenment. He read some of their writings and found that they served no other useful purpose except to spread heresy and unbelief. So apprehensive was he of the dangers of the modernist tendency that, to stamp it out, he did not spare himself a journey to Lemberg, the home and center of the Hebrew revival, when he was already in an ailing condition. He mistrusted the tendency of the rising Hebrew literature, disapproved of the secular use to which the sacred tongue was being put, and prayed: "Enable us to apply our mental faculties to no other thing except to serve thee in fear, and not to use our minds for any other opinions or sophistries." [11]

The man who did not shrink from declaring that "the mind is the soul," was unblushing in preaching the reactionary faith which was preached by the very men he had attacked. "A pure and simple faith without any intellectual varnish or sophistries" was the foundation upon which he reared his own religion. In one of his revealing prayers he addresses God: "Make me worthy to serve thee with a pure and unaffected faith. Guard me and save me, as well as all thy people Israel, from the probing and searching intellect." Poet and mystic as he was, God and the Torah were to him realities which did not need proof or confirmation from science or philosophy. The reality of God shone up to him from everything he saw in the world; he found it in and around nature. Traces of this Reality are detected in the animate and inanimate world. In fact, there was nothing inani-

mate for the poet who felt the throb of rhythmic motion running through the whole cosmos. Everything appeared to Rabbi Nahman as a "limb of the *Shekhinah*" whose presence encompasses all nature.

Nahman Bratzlav may be said to have been a poet of nature. Nature was to him both a passion and an ideal. To this he devoted himself really and truly with the creative imagination of an artist who gives to everything he sees dramatic expression. It was the organic side of nature that interested him, its living and creative substance. He spoke and wrote of it as though it had the sensations and emotions of a human being. He felt the throb of life running through its humblest creation. "Nature," he said, "is full of melody; heaven and earth are full of song. Every limb of the body contains within itself a melody that corresponds to the rhythm of song." Every blade of grass contains a melody, and "it is beautiful to listen to their song." Echoes of that melody are even in our food and drink, in our pleasures and raiment; in our enjoying them we are fulfilling the function and purpose of their being.

Prayer itself is a melody which transports man to the realms of eternity. This is the reason why it must be joyous, ecstatic, rapturous, without the taint of sadness or melancholy. That the melody of prayer should rise heavenward, and not fall to earth crushed and helpless, it should be recited amidst surroundings that would help it in its flight. He, therefore, urged that prayers should be recited in the open, amid the scented marvels of nature, for "the flowers and grasses of the field enter the prayers and give them power to rise to heaven."

The melody of the world must not be disturbed by its contrary dissonances of lying and falsehood, which is the reason why he made the practical application of Judaism the burden of many of his teachings. He found the Hassidim of his time ignorant of the most rudimentary principles of the Jewish religion. Judaism as an ethical way

of life had never been taught by any of the Zaddikim who preceded him, and the results were often deplorable. He loved truth passionately and taught that it were better for a man to die than to lie. His prayers abound in sentiments that implore God to shield him against the evils of falsehood, double-dealing and drunkenness, not uncommon weaknesses of the time.

VI

There are, on the other hand, discrepancies in the teachings of Nahman Bratzlav which seriously impair the truly beautiful and noble things he taught. Although courageous and unafraid, he did not attempt to stamp out the worst evil from which Hassidism was suffering. He started out on his career by trying to discover the cause and origin that brought Hassidism to its decline; he traced it to the stupidity and cupidity of the Zaddikim who accumulated power that they were using for their own selfish ends. Instead of limiting their authority, or driving them from their seat of power, he raised them to a position of dignity and importance they never before occupied. It is true that he had the *Zaddik Amiti,* "Perfect Zaddik," in mind, and "modestly" put himself up as an example, but this did not preclude every other Zaddik from proclaiming himself as the perfect one.

He advanced the claims of the Zaddik with the same measure of extravagance that he did his own. It is only a sickly imagination that could have harbored such an illusion. In his system the Zaddik ceases to be a man and becomes a Super-Deity, for he ascribes to him powers and authority which rival those of God. The Zaddik is the channel of influence who fructifies the whole of life; the world deriving from him not only spiritual, but material benefits as well. The redemptive powers of the Messiah are revealed in him; his influence abounds in heaven as on earth. He is the absolute leader and master of the world and his people must believe in him as they do in God Him-

self. He raised him to a level even higher than that of Moses and the Prophets, for he is master of the Torah to do with it whatever he will. God cannot do without the Zaddikim; He consults them in governing the world, interpreting literally the verse, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the Zaddikim." [12]

He bound the Hassidim to love the Zaddik and always to come to him, for it is only when he is surrounded with their love and presence that he can exert his influence and authority. He himself loved to have his Hassidim always about him, especially during the holidays and would accept no excuse for their absence. He said to them, "Eat or do not eat; sleep or do not sleep; pray or do not pray, but you must come to me." [13] Their faith in the Zaddik must overcome his apparent weakness, for the Zaddik is sometimes compelled to lower his light so that the world may not be dazzled by his brightness. His conception of the Zaddik must be condoned on the ground of poetic license, for the picture he drew of him is so exalted as to overshadow the claims that were made for him by the other Hassidic leaders. Exhausting every other prerogative, he even demanded that confession of sins be made to him, thus creating in Judaism a kind of Neo-Catholicism.

But the account is not on one side of the ledger, for there are duties which the Zaddik owes his Hassidim as well. He must, for example, always be with them as the soul is with the body. He must be their guide and leader and spur them on to deeds of kindness and righteousness. By his precept and example he must stimulate their mental and spiritual life and be helpful to them in all things.

VII

Exceptional men have also been exceptional story-tellers. Great literature is the art of story-telling made exquisite. What made the Bible famous is not its theology but its stories. Over the first, men fought and killed

one another, but they sat and pored together over the latter with rapt attention. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," thus begins the greatest story which an Andersen might have envied. "There was a man in the land of Uz . . . and that man was perfect and upright and feared God and eschewed evil," is the beginning of another story which held the world's attention for thousands of years. The Talmud is a cryptic and difficult book that none but those bent upon self-immolation should approach, but its stories are scented with all the perfumes of the Orient.

Rabbi Nahman is not an author for him who runs and reads. His principal work is replete with all the mystifying symbols of the writer's calling, but his stories are as free and balmy as the mountain air he breathed in his childhood. His chief claim to immortality is not as a theologian but as a story-teller; not as a philosopher but as a poet. Time and circumstances have washed away many of the strifes in which he was engaged and made it no longer necessary to either refute or defend his doctrines, but the fascinating stories he told of The Lost Princess, The Prince, The King's Son and the Servant's Son, and The Seven Beggars, are still loved and remembered.

The story is not an unpatronized art in the literature of the Jews. It was a favorite recreation of the rabbis two thousand years ago. The *Ma'asseh,* "story," or *Mashal,* "allegory," was used by them occasionally by way of illustration, at other times for entertainment, occasionally also as an introduction to serious and solemn discourses. Of a famous Talmudic scholar it is told that before commencing his lectures, he was in the habit of putting his hearers in a good mood by entertaining them with some light anecdotes.[14] In the hands of Nahman Bratzlav the story became an exquisitely fine instrument of pure delight, rarely found among Jewish writers. It may indeed be said that he was the classical story-teller of all times, not only in Hassidism, but in the whole range

of Jewish lore, with few, if any, equals in other literatures.

Story-telling was Rabbi Nahman's favorite occupation. A teacher, he said, must clothe his thoughts in attractive raiment. "The Zaddik is sometimes compelled to weave stories of worldly life around his teachings, because he cannot always proclaim them openly. . . . The Torah itself is wrapped about with stories and fables, without which it could not have survived." [14a] He told his stories on all occasions, when cheered by joy, or overwhelmed with sadness; on the Sabbath at the table, or during tedious wagon journeys; when instructing his disciples or when taking them on long walks. Always he would spin those fantastic yarns about kings and princes, heroes and beggars, saints and sinners.

There is color and variety in his stories. They move with graceful rhythm; they are clothed with life and charm. Writes Meyer Levin of the story of "The Seven Beggars," "Each tale is an intricate maze; the reader follows seven different paths, only to find himself suddenly standing still, bewildered and triumphant, at their common crossroads. The meaning is hidden, yet shining clear, for each person in each tale is a symbol as abstract as a numeral, and, at the end, the symbols seem miraculously to have taken their places in the pure formula of a given theorem." [15]

The stories did not come gushing out at once, for he sometimes took several days to complete one tale. Slowly and painfully they were evolved, thread after thread, musing over every point of their development. The listeners were impatient, waiting in suspense for the end, for they beheld deep mysteries in them. His scribe and secretary writes: "I tremble with wonder and excitement. I heard many marvellous tales from the mouth of our master, blessed be his memory, but none compared with this one." The narrator was sometimes moved by his own story and did not hesitate to record his impressions,

as he often did in words such as "It is marvellous, has many morals, and is most instructive."

Not all the stories have been recorded, for they were told spontaneously and without prior preparation for preserving them. The effect of the fairy tales was overwhelming upon their listeners; when they awoke, it was as though from a trance and they could remember only fragments of what they had heard. Nathan, the faithful scribe, was not always present at the beginning of a story, and when he heard that a wondrous tale was in progress, he hastened all the way from Niemerov to Bratzlav so as to take it down from his teacher's lips. Many fables were lost in this way; of the large number Rabbi Nahman told only thirteen have been preserved.

VIII

Not only his contemporaries, but modern readers as well found the stories brimming with mystery; efforts have been made to unravel them.[15a] Thus it is maintained that the story-teller did not create dream worlds, but described realities, episodes and incidents taken from his own life and experience. The tales are taken as attempts at self-portraiture, colorful interpretations of his ideas and teachings. When he was bowed down by suffering and grief at the death of his child, he told the story of "The Lost Princess." When the news of the upheaval caused by the Napoleonic wars came to him, and he was told of the lowly origin of the French emperor, Rabbi Nahman asked: "How do you know whose soul was within him? Perhaps his soul was exchanged in the heavenly nursery, and he has truly the soul of a king," and he went on to tell the story of "The King's Son and the Servant's Son."

More than any other tale, the story of "The Seven Beggars" may be taken as revealing the mind of Rabbi Nahman. Despite his boastfulness, he does not exaggerate when he pronounced it as "marvellous, and has many

morals, and is instructive." There is more than fiction in the words of the Deaf Man in the story, when he said: "I am not deaf at all, but the error of the world is not worth my hearing, for the world is all error, and all the cries of the people are but folly, and even their joy is full of error." It is the world-weary mystic who speaks with the tongue of the Dumb Beggar: "You only believe that I am dumb, but, in truth, I am not dumb at all, but I have no use for all men's words, except those that are uttered in praise of God, and all other words are not worth utterance." Or the Blind Beggar: "I am not blind at all, but in my sight the entire world is not worth the blink of an eye." One cannot help feeling that Nahman was describing the tragedy of his own life when he put into the mouth of the same beggar words such as, "I am very young, and I have not yet begun to live."

Rabbi Nahman was not drawing upon imagination, but was dramatizing his own life and the desperate struggle in which he was engaged to save the pristine truths of his great-grandfather when he told the story of the garden that was despoiled of its beautiful and luscious fruit and the people were compelled to feed on the wild growths of the dropped seeds. He was unquestionably thinking of himself when he spoke of the "real gardener" who came to save the garden, but was laughed at and even pelted with stones. These stories, one must remember, were told at the conclusion of his life, when death was already impending. At such a time, even the most gifted poet is in no mood for telling stories just for the pure delight of telling. They are torn, mutilated and bleeding pages wrenched from a tortured and suffering heart, revealing struggles and exposing the great burden of pain and sorrow under which he had been laboring.

Nahman himself regarded his stories as his greatest contribution, and not only retold them to Nathan, who wrote them down word for word, but carefully went over the manuscript with him, revising and correcting every

page and paragraph. He wanted them to appear as nearly as possible in the style and manner in which they were told. He was anxious that his stories should be preserved both in Hebrew and in Yiddish.

IX

Like Rabbi Israel and his disciple Dob Baer, Nahman was not a man of writing. He uttered the thoughts that flashed through his mind and left the task of preserving them to other men. But few men were as fortunate with their literary secretaries as was Rabbi Nahman with his newly discovered friend and disciple, Rabbi Nathan of Niemerov. A full chapter might be devoted to this rare and exceptional man who consciously obscured himself so that his teacher might shine all the more brightly. Nathan possessed all the needed qualifications for preserving the personality and genius of his master. He had learning; he had devotion; he had enthusiasm; but, above all, he possessed that self-effacing quality that enabled him to subordinate himself to the hero of his story. He had also a smooth and graceful style, and an understanding that made it possible for him to penetrate the mind of his teacher without losing anything of its subtlety. His devotion to Rabbi Nahman was surprising, almost amounting to worship. He regarded him as superhuman, actually trembling in his presence. None of his master's movements escaped him; he followed him wherever he went; recorded every chance saying; copied his words; translated his discourses; arranged his writings, and even looked after his physical comforts. It is owing to his devotion and faithfulness that we are able to look into the very soul of this most interesting of Hassidic leaders.

He not only told the story of his master, but also left a record of his own life.[16] Yet it is not the story of an individual life that he is telling, but the romance of a man who so lived that the story of a still greater man might be told. Nathan is always in the background, discreetly

hiding himself as it were, so that the outlines of the idol he is worshiping might appear all the more clearly. No man has practiced the Hassidic doctrine of self-abnegation any more thoroughly than this man.

Nathan came into the life of his teacher comparatively late, in the year 1802, less than ten years before the latter's death. He was one of a group of intelligent young Hassidim who fell under the spell and influence of the new master. His coming was accomplished not without a struggle, for he encountered the opposition both of his own parents and those of his wife who disapproved of his new attachment. Their disapproval became all the stronger when he neglected his family and spent long periods of time in the company of his master. Rabbi Nahman was a helpful but exacting employer, and the strain upon his secretary must have been enormous.

He was more than a mere tool in the hands of Rabbi Nahman. He not only wrote down his discourses and collected money for their publication, but made himself the apostle of his teachings, often wandering from place to place spreading his doctrine. When, in his declining days, his teacher was no longer able to meet the storms of opposition that had broken over his head, his friend and pupil took up his sword and wielded it with a strong hand. He wrote letters, published books and pamphlets, undertook long journeys; in fine, did everything possible to defend the name and fame of his master. When Rabbi Nahman died and his enemies rejoiced, hoping that his influence would die with him, there was no faltering of Nathan's zeal. Surviving his teacher by a number of years, he devoted himself exclusively to the task of preserving his master's memory. He set up printing presses in Bratzlav and published Rabbi Nahman's books; he built a synagogue near his grave so that his teacher's plea, "I want to remain among you always, and you must visit my grave," [16a] might be fulfilled.

The success of great ideals does not always depend

upon the men who create them, but upon the idealism and sacrifice of his disciples and followers who labor for their continuance. This is what happened to Judaism at every stage of its development, and this is what also happened to Hassidism. The legendary figure of Israel Baal Shem Tob was clothed with flesh and blood by Jacob Joseph and his other disciples and followers. Popular folklore has done much for Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev; if the romance of Nahman Bratzlav is still being told, and, for more than one hundred years, his stories are read, so as to make his prophecy, "The torch I have lit will burn forever," and, "The time will come when all the world will seek out Bratzlav," come true, the credit for all this is due to no other than his pupil and apostle, Nathan of Niemerov, the generous friend, the devoted disciple, the faithful follower, who, without thought of personal cost or sacrifice, reared for his teacher a monument that will not perish.

X

Although Rabbi Nahman spent the most tranquil years of his life in Bratzlav, he did not want to die there. When the condition of his malady made the hope of his recovery vain, he went about from town to town to find a place where to lay his head. Such a spot he finally found in Uman, a small town near the City of Kiev, rich in tragic memories for the Jewish people, as it was sanctified by the blood of martyrs who died there during the persecutions of 1648. Remembering his own suffering, the city's reputation for martyrdom pleased Rabbi Nahman and he settled there in the year 1810. His followers he told that he had chosen Uman because its martyrs lacked the strength to journey to heaven, and therefore pleaded with him to make his grave there.[17]

His last days were marred by great suffering. His malady was beginning to show its deadly effect, till, in the end, he completely collapsed. He tried to hide his condi-

tion from those who surrounded him, but concealment was no longer possible and he often broke down in their presence. He would be seized with violent coughing spells, not infrequently attended by hemorrhages. His disciples pleaded with him to spare himself, but he continued his discourses, feeling that his working days would not be many.[17a]

At such times, depression would assail him, and he often soliloquized upon death. "Why fear death," he would say to those about him. "Must we not all die one day?" Little of his former optimism remained; he brooded morbidly upon the vanity of life and the futility of greatness. He longed for the quiet and peaceful life of the humble man, and yearningly recalled his own childhood.

He was cheered for a while by the appearance of his principal work, *Likute Moharan,* "A Collection of the Teachings of Rabbi Nahman," and the favorable reception it enjoyed. Many Zaddikim spoke flatteringly of it and recommended its reading. As a dying flame will sometimes flicker up with unusual brilliance before it goes out, Rabbi Nahman's old-time self-confidence suddenly returned to him. Spurred on by the success of his work, his old pride and vanity flared up and he again spoke of himself and his work in the most flattering terms. "Should the existence of a treasure," he said, "be suddenly revealed, would not men run after it and try to recover it, even spending many days of toil and labor in order to restore it from the dust and mire in which it is buried? Why, then, should not people run after me, seeing that I am such a treasure full of the knowledge and fear of God?" [18]

He was unsparing in the praise he bestowed upon his book, pronouncing it as "the beginning of redemption. Men must read and study it till they had learned it by heart." He regarded the very possession of the book as a pious act, even though one does not grasp its contents.

"It is the duty of every man," he claimed, "to secure for himself a copy of the book even when in doing so he has to part with his last pillow." His feverish imagination, now unusually active, drew many other flattering pictures of his book which he considered the equal of the Torah, if not surpassing it.[18a]

The brief spell of triumph was soon forfeited by the inroads his malady was making. Deeper and deeper became the clouds that were now hanging over him as his condition was growing daily worse. Death was now his constant theme. He gave orders how he should be buried, and what prayers and psalms were to be recited at his grave. He implored his Hassidim to visit his grave and talk to him as though he were alive. When his disciples realized that their master was dying, they watched at his bedside day and night. When he saw them weep, he comforted them. "Why weep? I am only going to prepare the way for you." Rabbi Nahman showed no regret at his dying; in fact, he gave every proof that he welcomed the change. He regarded himself as having reached the highest rank and could go on no further as long as he was within the material film of his body and was glad of the opportunity to shed it. "It is not good for a man," he said shortly before he breathed his last, "always to remain in one rank (*Madregah*), even when he has attained to the highest." [19]

When death was approaching his faithful Nathan cried out, "Rabbi, Rabbi, to whom are you leaving us?" Nahman answered with his fast-ebbing strength, "I am not leaving you, God forbid," and with this he died on the fourth day of Sukkoth, 1811, in the thirty-ninth year of his life. But to his followers he continued to live. His lowly and humble grave became a shrine visited by thousands who prayed and spoke to him as though he were alive and could hear their voices.

The stormy career of the Teacher of Bratzlav was ended, but not before it had impressed itself upon a mul-

titude of disciples and followers who caught up his spirit and carried it to the future. His talents, his struggles, and his fearless heart made him the most romantic and fascinating figure in the history of the Hassidic movement. A teacher of thousands, he made his name a symbol if not of a new sect, at least of countless numbers within the Hassidic group, who, to this day, refuse to merge their identity with the followers of any other Zaddik, observing the rites and carrying out the customs taught them by their sainted Master of Bratzlav.

Chapter XII

ORDEAL AND VINDICATION

In a surprisingly short time Hassidism became the way of life of many Jewish communities in the world. The religion of tenderness preached by Rabbi Israel fell like a gentle dew upon the lonely hearts of the sorry creatures who lived and languished behind the gloomy ghetto walls, creating an environment that was congenial to their religious temperament. It is no exaggeration to say that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, less than fifty years after the death of its founder, Hassidism was the dominant faith of the majority of Jews in Eastern Europe.

While it spread also to countries beyond the Vistula, it was principally in the Slavonic territories, where its empire was born, that Hassidism scored its greatest triumph and won its widest popularity. There was something in the spiritual atmosphere of these lands that made Hassidism a congenial religion to their Jewish inhabitants. As though casting a spell upon all who came in contact with it, thousands flocked to its banner, thus providing a phenomenon quite unique and unparalleled in the history of dissenting sects. So convinced were the Hassidim of the national character of their movement that they did not hesitate to dub as *Mithnagdim,* or "Dissenters," all the Jews who kept aloof from their rising faith.

Galicia early surrendered to Hassidism; Roumania became overwhelmingly Hassidic; Hungary answered its challenge with enthusiasm; smaller states in the Austrian monarchy fell into its net; in the Russian part of Poland,

the tide of the new faith resembled a flood, with city after city joining its enlarging empire, while in Palestine, Hassidic conventicles were established simultaneously with the very birth of the movement. That Hassidism did not complete its conquest and encircle the whole Jewish world was not due so much to the active opposition of its opponents as to the force of circumstances that stood in the way and prevented its further spread and progress.

Bohemia might have been expected to answer the call of its Austrian sister-states and join the Hassidic propaganda, but this country, although territorially looking toward Hungary and Galicia, was spiritually more closely allied with Germany and Lithuania. Although the country prided itself on a strongly organized Jewish community, its Jews were divided into two sharply distinct groups. There were the traditionally loyal Jews, among whom Jewish learning stood in high esteem and who, like their brethren in Lithuania, denounced every deviation from the path of strict orthodoxy as heresy. Ezekiel Landau, the celebrated rabbi of Prague, was the leader of this conservative group. Almost at the very beginning of the movement, he erected in Prague a wall against Hassidism which its enthusiasts have never been able to demolish; and the tradition of antagonism he had established was piously carried out by his disciples and followers. But there was, on the other hand, a culturally progressive and sophisticated class of Jews who felt themselves more closely related to their brethren in Germany than to those in Eastern Europe. From neither of these groups could Hassidism hope for much encouragement. While the orthodox Jews of Bohemia feared Hassidism because of its religious novelties, the latter kept away from it because of its superstitions.

The Jews of Turkey might have been expected to provide the material for the Hassidic propaganda. Children of a Mohammedan environment, they should have been tempted by the mystical atmosphere of the new faith.

The sense of wonder is more highly acute among the people of the East than among their brethren in the Christian countries of Europe. Fantastic, imaginative, superstitious, the Jews in the Mohammedan lands have been known to follow blindly men and movements however exotic and reckless. Yet, with the exception of Palestine, it was in the countries of the Turkish empire that Hassidism failed to take root.

The Jews of Turkey remembered their experiences with another sectarian creed and were careful not to repeat the mistake. Sabbatai Zebiism may have affected the Jews of all the world, but it was by the Jews of Salonica and Turkey that its shame and reproach were felt most keenly. It was their country that provided the scene for one of the most tragic episodes in Jewish history. Having been the victims of one delusion, it was to be expected that they should be careful not to fall into the snare of another experiment in religion.

There were also other barriers which made Hassidism an alien faith to the Jews in the lands of the crescent. Although children of the same historic destiny, the Jews of Turkey were linguistically not on speaking terms with their brethren in Eastern Europe. Speaking an idiom other than Yiddish, the Jews of the Islamic countries had practically excluded themselves from active communion with their brethren in Christian Europe. Living in almost complete mental and spiritual isolation from the great Jewries in the West, they had been little influenced by their religious and cultural movements. The fame of Sabbatai Zebi reached out also to such Jewish communities of the world as did not understand his dialect largely because he hailed from a city which was one of the commercial highways of the world and came as the promised Redeemer, but not so Israel Baal Shem Tob, whose capital was as obscure as his claims were modest. With such a handicap in the way it was but natural that, while almost half the Jewries of the world were greeting

the advent of Hassidism, the Jews of Turkey should have remained blissfully ignorant of it.

II

Hassidism may be regarded as one of the most important and original movements not only in the history of the Jews, but in the history of all religious development because it is not a reformist movement in the ordinary acceptance of the term. While other dissenting creeds arose to reform their mother religion, Hassidism did not propose to reform the belief but the believer, not Judaism but the Jew. It aimed not to weaken the Jewish religion, but strengthen it; not to abrogate its customs and traditions but surround them with deeper meaning and value. Although based on a new principle and conception of religion, it did not come to proclaim a new doctrine, but as a continuation of the old Kabbalah. Like all mystic movements, Hassidism is a temperament rather than a religion, an attitude and atmosphere rather than a philosophic system. This largely is the reason why it succeeded, and why Judaism, which has been hostile to reforms and reformers, has proven hospitable to this movement.

But it also had its ordeals. Largely they came from Lithuania, that old battleground where swords had clashed before. That the rush of Hassidism stopped at the gates of Wilna, and that even in countries like Galicia and Poland the large communities, the seats of Jewish intelligence, were not completely swept away by its flood, was mainly due to this struggle. Southern Russia had capitulated to Hassidism, but the North, with Wilna as the capital of Rabbinism, refused to lower its flag without stubborn resistance. Sheneir Zalman had obtained official recognition for his sect, but of what avail are government decrees in the face of unwilling and obstinate hearts? The cause of Rabbinism was seriously impaired by the death of the Gaon, but his name was still a magnet to

draw thousands to his banner. Rabbi Elijah went to his grave with his work only half done; his followers vowed to complete his unfinished task. What more effective battle-cry is there than to summon the faithful to follow the lead of a fallen master? The memories of the old struggle had not yet been obliterated; with but little ingenuity they were fanned into a raging flame again. In many respects the passion of the new crusaders surpassed the zeal of the old warrior and carried his flag to fronts which he would have hesitated to attack.

One such man was Israel Loebel, an obscure and little known man, an itinerant preacher who was a curious blend of fanatical piety and personal ambition. Although he launched his campaign against Hassidism while the Gaon was still alive, he continued it for some time after his death. It is not known whether he was a free-lance or the chosen instrument of the opposing group, but if the latter, the Mithnagdim could not have selected a more vigorous and energetic campaigner. Without much learning or originality, but gifted with a sharp tongue and ready pen, he passed through the Jewish communities of Russia and Poland kindling the torch of conflict in the easily aroused hearts. The times were sufficiently excited for any man, however mediocre, to obtain a hearing. Appeals to the passions were the safest method of attracting and holding an audience, and in this Loebel had few equals. Without raising a new issue, without advancing a new argument, without even coining a single memorable phrase or epigram, he traveled through many cities, crossed the frontiers of several countries, preached many sermons and published pamphlets which he personally distributed. He was energetic, fearless and courageous, and he is even said to have secured an audience with the Austrian monarch whom he presented with one of his tracts which he begged to have translated into German. The brochure did at length appear in translation, but not as he had hoped, by royal command, but at the instigation

of the German pioneers of "Enlightenment" who found in his diatribes a welcome weapon against their hated enemies, the Hassidim.

Israel Loebel disappeared as suddenly as he came, for after 1799, his steps cannot be traced. Although the belligerent protagonist of Rabbinism attracted considerable notice during the years of his activity, complete obscurity covered him as soon as he retired from the arena. The three brochures,[1] which is all that was left of his clamorous and stormy career, although they abound in abuse and denunciation, fail to betray the slightest sign of recognition of the underlying ideals and principles of the movement he spent so much time in attacking.

While Loebel derided and caricatured Hassidism, he seems to have been utterly innocent of its inner spirit. He lacerated the outward faults of the movement without trying to fathom its depth. He ridiculed, laughed at and taunted its leaders, without making an effort to understand the secret of their power or the reason of their strength and influence. He raged, fulminated, cursed and damned without attempting to disprove the position or logic of the faith he was discrediting. He vented his spleen with particular violence against Sheneir Zalman whom he accused of every manner of hypocrisy and corruption, without proving that he had either read or understood his principal work. He charged him with the responsibility of leading astray his brother from the path of traditional orthodoxy, without knowing that Hassidism was by that time a flood that carried people along by its own momentum. The campaign of Israel Loebel is perhaps the best illustration of the ways and means the waning power of Rabbinism employed in proceeding against the growing power of Hassidism.

An equally caustic if less effective opponent of Hassidism, was David Makow who styled himself a pupil of the Gaon of Wilna, although he may have only been one of his numerous followers. A less vigorous campaigner than

Loebel, he conducted his agitation with greater care and circumspection, repeatedly emphasizing that it was not against the truly pious and saintly Hassidim that he was proceeding, but their hypocritical counterfeits. He attacked the noisy display of the Hassidim, their uncouth manners, their lack of refinement and the indecorous form of their synagogue service. He censured their departure from the orthodox faith and charged them with all the sorrows and misfortunes that befell the Jews since the advent of Hassidism. He contrasted the humility, poverty and simplicity of the life of the rabbis with the arrogance and magnificence of the Hassidic courts. He sketched briefly the rise of Hassidism and ascribed the origin of the movement to the worldly ambition of Rabbi Israel and his love of fame and popularity. Although less virulent in his attack than his fellow campaigner, he does not seem to display any greater knowledge or appreciation of the underlying motives that inspired the Hassidic uprising. Reason and sober judgment abdicate when passion takes the field, and while there was little of the former in the struggle against Hassidism, there was plenty of the latter. The brochures David Makow left behind [2] would have been utterly worthless were it not for the light they throw on the spirit and temper of the times and the source from which Jewish writers and historians drew their knowledge and information of Hassidism.

III

The polemical literature of those turbulent times deserves a great deal more reading than it gets to-day. It is full of amusing and instructive sidelights upon the mentality of the men engaged in the struggle. It was not with sharp but blunt weapons that the war against Hassidism was waged; not with zeal that kindled enthusiasm, but with words from which the fire of holy conviction had fled. Religious controversies often created winged words,

memorable phrases that were remembered long after the heat and passion of the conflict had died away. Even when the issue was obscure and the cause of the struggle no longer remembered, there were ringing calls to battle which, like shining swords, left imperishable memories behind. Great books were the fruits of such controversies and literature the product of stirring days.

No such redeeming feature, however, characterizes the long and bitter struggle between Rabbinism and Hassidism. When the literature of the famous conflict is examined, one is amazed to find what little pains had been taken to understand the underlying principles of the Hassidic revolt. Here was a new light breaking in upon the Jewish world, a spiritual insurrection such as Jewish history had not known in many a century, casting a spell upon thousands of Jews, with community after community caught in its propaganda, finding expression in many books and personalities, yet, nowhere was an attempt made to fathom the cause and meaning of the change. There were great rabbis in that generation who mastered the lore of two thousand years, but were ignorant of what was going on under the very shadow of the synagogues over which they presided.

If one is to judge by the literary remains of the struggle, the admission is inescapable that the Hassidim had the best of the argument. Despite all the wisdom and learning of the rabbis, they lacked the burning zeal and conviction that give even a commonplace cause the appearance of a holy crusade. With all the advantages on their side, learning, numbers and public opinion, they failed to make the best of their opportunity. As compared with the polemical literature of the Hassidim, that of their opponents was flat, dull and uninteresting. One is caustic, fearless, courageous, flashing out witty sallies and rare epigrams, the other is weak and timid, fuming and fulminating with impotent rage. One is smashing precedents and dethroning idols, the other is citing texts and quot-

ing authorities the people no longer believed or respected. While the polemical literature of the Hassidim is still being read by thousands, that of the *Mithnagdim* consists of anathemas and excommunications, museum relics of a day bygone.

The Gaon of Wilna was surely a match for any of the opponents of Rabbinism. He was master not only of the Talmudic lore but of several other lores besides. He was a great Kabbalist, an expert logician, a mind stored with all the wisdom and learning of his people. Yet what was his contribution to the great controversy in which he was a central figure? Truth compels one to admit, absolutely nothing. Had he wanted he could have terminated the struggle that threatened to wreck the unity of the Jewish people; had he wished it, he could have ended the strife between the warring factions; both his followers and opponents were hanging on his words. He could have called a truce to a conflict whose results were sad and tragic. But, instead, he shut himself up in his study, as though he was indifferent to the harvest of hate and bitterness the struggle was reaping.[3] While the leaders of Hassidism were building their faith upon the foundations of living men and women, Rabbi Elijah commanded his most famous pupil to found another Yeshibah! It is thus that Hassidism, for many years a fugitive and very tenuous thing, a warming gleam of light hardly destined to endure, survived, perhaps not so much by reason of its own strength as because of the weakness and impotence of the forces of the opposition that threatened to put it out.

IV

When, at the dawn of the Haskalah, the rusty weapons of persecution were changed for the more refined tools of literary oppression, there was no change for the better in the understanding of Hassidism on the part of their opponents. When excommunication and book-burning became no longer fashionable, the pioneers of Enlighten-

ment embarked upon a campaign of silencing Hassidism by making it ridiculous. "Like David in the camp of the Philistines the satirists threw off the heavy armor of serious disputation and went forth to meet the false Zaddikim with the sling of parody in one hand and the smooth missiles of irony in the other." [4] Rabbinism and Hassidism were equally hateful to the "enlightened," but it was against the latter that they vented their spleen.

It is almost inconceivable that the leaders of *Haskalah,* among whom were many men of genuine literary talent and poetic insight, could see nothing but waste and corruption in a movement that was so rich and colorful, containing a veritable storehouse of folklore, myths and legends. "They could not sense and understand," writes a historian of that period, "the awkward simplicity, the crude depth of the clumsy attempt to stammer the ineffable. They saw merely the repellent exterior, and because they rejected the irrational and unæsthetic, they viewed the entire Hassidic movement as an aberration and a snare, a quackery, or, at least, self-delusion." [5] Even so deep and sincere a thinker as Nahman Krokhmal, styled the "Galician Socrates," whose judgment was usually keen and his speech tempered, found it difficult to overcome his aversion to Hassidism and spoke of it in unmeasured terms of reproach.[6]

Solomon Maimon, a contemporary of what has been called "the golden age of Hassidism," who did not find it difficult to understand Emanuel Kant, could see nothing but expert showmanship in the great movement that dawned with the advent of Hassidism.[7] Even Graetz, the historian who unfolded a panorama of four thousand years of Jewish history, spoke thus of Hassidism: "The new sect, a daughter of darkness, was born in gloom, and even to-day proceeds stealthily on its mysterious way. . . . As ugly as the name, Besht was the form of the founder of the order that he called into existence." [8] Of his treatment of the Kabbalah, and more particularly,

Hassidism, one feels with Ahron Marcus, a brilliant Galician exponent of the movement, that Graetz would have done better had he ignored the last phase of Jewish history altogether, and, having commenced with the crossing of the Jordan he should have stopped before the crossing of the Vistula.[9]

It was not until many years later that the first revealing word of the true nature and historic significance of Hassidism was spoken by Moses Hess, himself neither a Maskil nor a mystic, but a socialist, in his famous work, "Rome and Jerusalem." "Chassidism," he said, "built its house and developed within the folds of the living spirit of a Judaism which was influenced, more instinctively than consciously, by the spirit of modern times, and thus formed a transition from mediæval Judaism to a regenerated Judaism, which is still conceived as being in the process of development. The great good which will result from a combination of Chassidism with the national movement, is almost incalculable. Chassidism makes great gains in the great Jewish centers in the East. Even the rabbis, who heretofore have declared Chassidism a heresy, are beginning to understand that there are only two alternatives for the great Jewish masses of Eastern Europe; either to be absorbed along with the reformers by the gradually penetrating external culture, or to avert this catastrophe by an inner regeneration of which Chassidism is certainly a forerunner." And, further, being a socialist and therefore impressed with the democratic and fraternal spirit of Hassidism, he writes: "A sect which practices such self-abnegation and whose members are capable of great religious enthusiasm, must have for its foundation something more than mere crudeness and ignorance." [10]

The literary campaign against Hassidism, however, went lustily on, and, although it failed to weaken the movement, unconsciously succeeded in something that was of infinitely greater importance. Opposition to Hassid-

ism, if it did not exactly create the Hebrew satire, greatly stimulated its appearance. Satire, or parody, which is part of the imitative tendency in human beings, has risen in Hebrew literature to a highly developed art. It is found in the Bible, its traces may be followed in the Talmud, and during the Middle Ages, it was a popular form of amusement and diversion. But never was it used with such skill and effectiveness as in the middle of the nineteenth century when its arrows, tipped with poison, were shot in the direction of the Hassidic camp. Whereas heretofore the Hebrew satire was purely playful, intended for fun and merrymaking, it now assumed a polemical character and was used for a definite purpose.

V

When the great rabbis were unsparing in their condemnation of Hassidism, little more could be expected of the fanatics of Haskalah [11] who inherited their intolerance if not their learning. Fighting what they called superstition with savage and merciless severity, they imitated the Hassidim, parodied their style and mimicked their speech and conduct with such perfect skill and precision, that in many instances the counterfeit was mistaken for the original, the readers finding themselves at a loss whether the books were written by friends or foes of Hassidism.

Foremost among these parody authors was one Joseph Perl (1774-1839), a Galician writer and herald of Enlightenment. His book, *Megaleh Temirin,* "Revealer of Secrets," became so popular that it was read by thousands in Galicia, Russia and Germany. We have the testimony of a contemporary authority who said that the effect of the book was so crushing that Hassidim were ashamed to appear in public for fear of being pointed to as one of the characters in the book. "Perl showed his power as a satirist not so much by parodying the diction and style of the Hassidim as by parodying the Hassid himself. Ad-

dressing himself to the Hassidim, he put himself on their level, entered sympathetically into their ideas, and viewed life with their eyes. He imitated their speech, simulated their love of exaggeration, and assumed to share in their belief of the supernatural. . . . In other words, it was the whole Hassidic atmosphere, not one solitary trait that Perl subjected to ridicule." [12] Another book, *Bohen Zaddik,* "The Test of the Righteous," followed, but with less outstanding success.

The attempt to discredit Hassidism by making it ridiculous, initiated by Perl, found many followers and imitators. Perhaps the most brilliant of this group was Isaac Erter (1792-1851), a man of considerable Jewish and secular learning, a physician by profession and a Hebrew writer by choice and instinct. As a critic and satirist of the customs and manners of his age, Erter was a writer of the first order. For vivacity of style, at once elegant and incisive, he may be compared with his contemporaries Heine and Boerne, although he was more serious than the former and more original than the latter. To his credit it must be admitted that, without bias or passion, but with fine irony, he castigated the Hassidim—what he considered their superstitions and their worship of angels and demons. But their opponents did not escape the sharp edge of his criticism as well; for, with biting sarcasm, he caricatured the narrow-mindedness of their rabbis and the shabby vanity of the communal representatives. His principal work, *Hazofeh L'Beth Yisroel,* "The Watchman of the House of Israel," is a classic of Hebrew style and diction still read with delight and interest.

It was, however, not alone by the Hebrew poets and essayists that Hassidism was derided and ridiculed, but by their more serious contemporaries as well. Krokhmal's slighting opinion of the movement served as a test for many another who followed in his footsteps. Solomon Rapoport was a pioneer in the science of Judaism; but while he labored all his life in trying to restore forgotten

Jewish worthies, he had nothing but censure for the movement that was destined to affect the life of the Jewish people. Oblivious of all their other teachings, he published a tract in which he attacked the Hassidim and their wonder-working saints as though they were the only yardstick by which the movement was to be judged.

Although Galicia was the home of the anti-Hassidic propaganda, the crusade was by no means limited to that country. Hebrew writers in Russia discovered in Hassidism a fertile field for the exercise of their literary talents and spared no effort in proving how much they had benefited by the opportunity. The Hebrew renaissance may be said to have arisen in the wake of Hassidism, the movement providing a subject for some of its best known products in prose and poetry. Mapu, Smolenskin, Gordon and Zederbaum were among its ungentle critics. Gottlober, who, as a poet, lacked warmth or feeling, wrote his best prose when he reminisced his experiences among the Hassidim; and Isaac Baer Levinsohn, called by some the "Russian Mendelssohn," a sage otherwise kind and gentle, made Hassidism the subject of a special tract. This does not take into account the works of many minor authors or the periodical literature which may be said to be actually teeming with the subject of Hassidism.

One man alone, Eliezer Zweifel (1815-1888), dared to challenge the complacency and self-satisfied attitude of his contemporaries by introducing into the controversy an original note. In *Shalom Al Yisroel,* "Peace Unto Israel," he departed from the method of his literary colleagues by submitting the teachings of Hassidism to a critical and impartial examination. After reviewing the verdict of the critics of the movement, he arrived at his own conclusion. While not condoning the errors and superstitions of the sect, he pointed out its many excellent teachings and the pure and saintly character of some of its leaders. With true historic insight, he regarded Hassidism as a movement worthy of serious considera-

tion, and held forth the Gaon of Wilna, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob and Moses Mendelssohn, not as antagonistic forces, but as different manifestations of the genius of the Jews.

His work fell like a bombshell in the camp of the Hebrew writers, and the periodical literature of the day was full of refutations and repudiations of his theory. Honest criticism was a thankless art in those days, and Zweifel was made to pay the full price of its novelty. He was derided, he was taunted, he was laughed at, he was suspected, even made to bear the burden of shame and humiliation. For, not only was he suspected of dishonest motives, but his friends and colleagues at the Rabbinical Seminary at Zhitomir publicly repudiated his views, allaying the disturbed feelings by a declaration that his views were not shared by the other members of the faculty.[13]

But the work of Eliezer Zweifel served its purpose. The question-mark he had injected into the minds of his contemporaries was never completely lost. After the temporary disturbance he aroused had passed away, there were many honest critics who admitted the correctness of his position. While he did not immediately bring about the "Peace Unto Israel" he was laboring for, he no doubt helped to hasten its advent. The fair and impartial manner in which the book was written, its balanced judgment and apparent earnestness prepared the way for a more thorough and serious examination of the place of the Hassidic movement in the thought and history of the Jewish people.

VI

It was only belatedly, very belatedly, that a change came about. It took a long time for the Haskalah fanatics to realize the mistake they were making. Tucked away behind the fortifications of their ancient prejudices, and hypnotizing themselves with such glamorous and high-sounding phrases as Emancipation and Enlighten-

ment, they were quite unconscious of the fatal error they were committing by their stubborn opposition to a movement that contained within it the elements of new life. They failed to realize that by resisting Hassidism, they were ignoring the only genuinely spontaneous Jewish source that bore the stamp of originality. At the time they were trying to create a so-called Hebrew literature that was supported by the ideas and ideals of foreign importation, they were spurning the rich ore of the literary creativeness that was inherent in the Hassidic faith.

It was not until after the tragic experience of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when their imaginary hopes of freedom and security had broken down, that the Jewish intellectuals sobered up from their intoxication and began to consider the question of Jewish culture in more serious terms than before.

The awakening was rude and disappointing. It was not a sudden but a slow and painful realization that forced the conviction upon them that the Enlightenment in which they were being encouraged by the governments of Europe was but a cunning scheme by which they were to be lured to the bosom of the Christian Church. In only too many instances, Enlightenment became synonymous with licentiousness and apostasy. The few intellectual crumbs that were handed out to the Jews, instead of feeding them, brought them spiritual death.[14]

The *entente cordiale* that was established between the Jewish intelligentsia and the nations of Europe ended for the Jews in national and religious suicide. Russification and Polonization became the war-cry in the Jewish circles of Eastern Europe as Germanization had long since been the watchword of their brethren in the West. What Leroy Beulieau said of Solomon Maimon, "Despite his learning and philosophy, he sank deeper than the most degraded of his fellow-men, because, in repudiating this ancestral faith, he lost the staff which, through all their

humiliation, served as a prop even to the most debased ancient Jew," [15] might have been applied to many of the protagonists of the new Enlightenment that was preached with such zeal and enthusiasm by the Jewish intellectuals. Thus it was that, after half a century of strife and antagonism, Hassidim and Mithnagdim suddenly woke up one day to find that they had a mutual enemy to fight.

In the meantime, Hassidism itself was undergoing a radical change. The fanaticism of its early enthusiasts was gradually giving way to a more sober and enlightened philosophy of the movement. Under the intelligent leadership of the Rabbi of Ladi the sect succeeded in shedding a good deal of its original crudeness, and the foundation for a more enlightened understanding of its teachings was laid. It was under this impulse of change that had come over Hassidism that the Zaddik lost much of his original glamour and was put on a par with the traditional rabbi, whose place and function in the community was not so much to amuse his followers with wonder-works as to teach them the ways of righteousness.[16]

It was then, too, that the poetic figure of Nahman Bratzlav, that curious blend of so many opposite and contradictory elements of fanatic and reformer, reactionary and radical, visionary and practical builder of a new sect, was for the first time revealed. His life, his struggles, his sufferings were an epic sufficient to impress and inspire the most unimaginative mind. His stories, his epigrams, his aphorisms, and his deep understanding and appreciation of nature, worthy of the greatest poet, began to circulate in quarters that were heretofore ignorant of him. The Hebrew intellectuals of the younger generation were attracted to him, and they wondered at the simplicity of his life and the depth of his genius.

One discovery led to another. The impressive figure of Nahman Bratzlav provided the incentive to probe and search for the source and origin of this strange and re-

markable man. The results were amazing, for a veritable fountain of poetry and fantasy, of learning and wisdom was discovered in the Hassidic movement. It was thus that Hassidism became revealed to a generation that had little knowledge of it, that the tiny spark, all these years struggling for life and almost extinguished, was at last blown into a flame, warming and inspiring the hearts of thousands of men.

VII

It is, however, to J. L. Perez that the credit for making the discovery is due. He was a writer gifted with a rarely poetic and sensitive soul.[17] He lived in Warsaw, styled the "Paris of Eastern Europe," a city that in the pre-war days was a curious combination of fanaticism and enlightenment. Almost every known variety of Jews, the assimilated Jews of the West and their reactionary brethren of the East, Polonized Hebrews and their "co-religionists" who were making annual pilgrimages to the shrines of the Hassidic saints in Galicia, were jostling each other in its streets. Perez was a Maskil who had inherited the best traditions of the Haskalah without its prejudices. Hassidism was to him not so much a religious sect as a temperament and view of the world and of Judaism, which he felt himself called upon to interpret for the benefit of those who did not understand or grasp its meaning.

He began to tell stories such as Baal Shem or Nahman Bratzlav might have told, wonder and miracle stories one might have expected to hear from an infatuated Hassid. They were simple and homely tales about Hassidim and their saints, "without paint or powder, yet, how beautiful!" The stories appeared in the Hebrew newspapers and magazines and were read and admired by thousands. His success was immediate. The legends were unlike the dull and monotonous stories of the Haskalah writers. Perez discovered Hassidism for the Jew-

ish world, and by so doing, he not only broke down the barriers of an old prejudice, but laid the foundation for a new kind of Hebrew literature.

Soon other writers followed—Berditchevsky, Zeitlin, Steinberg, Agnon—men of creative genius and poetic insight, who extended the domain of Hassidism and made it world-wide. Once the antagonism was broken, the pace was rapid. The historic significance of Hassidism was realized by men like Dubnow, Horodezky and Kahana, who, in voluminous works devoted to the subject, traced the history and development of the movement to its sources. Since Perez had made his discovery, books on Hassidism have become so numerous, covering every phase of the subject—historical, philosophical and imaginative—as to make it almost impossible to keep up with them.

The success with which the Hebrew writers had met, encouraged their fellow craftsmen in other languages. Thus the movement that was frowned upon by the Jewish intellectuals, who either ignored it altogether or at best treated it apologetically, suddenly became a popular fad with writers in many lands. Dr. Solomon Schechter won credentials for Hassidism in the English language,[18] and his example was followed by historians, essayists and novelists in other countries.

But the credit for westernizing Hassidism is due to no other man more than to Martin Buber, a citizen of the very country where the Hassidic "superstition" was most despised.[19] While Hassidism during the past quarter of a century had many interpreters, no other man has treated it with the same illuminating insight as this philosopher, poet and mystic. He more than translated the teachings and stories of Hassidism. He re-created them. He wove around them such magic beauty of color and diction as to make his works a shining contribution to world literature. Chaim Bloch in German, Meyer Levin and Louis I. Newman in the English language followed

his example, thus extending the frontiers of the Hassidic empire.

While Hassidism belongs exclusively to the heritage of Israel, Christian scholars became aware of it and enriched its literature with a number of learned studies. As the legacy of the Kabbalah, the Church takes a pardonable interest in the subject which early piqued its curiosity. But while the interest of the Church in the Kabbalah was subjective, followed principally for the light it was believed to shed on Christian doctrine, modern scholars feel themselves drawn to Hassidism for the sheer romance and poetry of the movement. While the literature of Hassidism has been rewarded by several treatises from this source, it was left to Torsten Ysander, a Scandinavian scholar, to contribute the most exhaustive and penetrating book on the subject.[20]

Chapter XIII

TEST OF HASSIDISM

A writer on the fine arts made the qualities of stability, utility and beauty the test of great architecture. An edifice, he said, must possess the elements of permanence, service and grace in order to be classed as fine workmanship. The same credentials may also be demanded of the ideas and movements that strive to sway and influence the world. Time must determine their durability, service their worthwhileness, and grace and beauty their hold and influence. It may be said of many of the great world movements that they have successfully measured up to this standard. Time and change have not affected them, great hearts have lived by them, and genius used them as a background from which it took its flight.

When one considers the length of Jewish history and its world-wide character, coming in contact with almost every shade of religious opinion and world outlook, the admission is inescapable that there are fewer sects and parties among Jews than among any other race or people in the world. Not that there had been no dissenting groups among the Jews, for there were; but, because they lacked the saving graces of stability, utility and beauty, Judaism felt itself impelled to reject them. There were times in Jewish history when one philosophy after another, when one world outlook after another threatened to disrupt the religious unity and continuity of the Jewish people. The Sadducees and the Karaites stirred up what promised to be the beginning of religious insurrections with consequences grave and serious. Kings, priests and scholars were on the side of the revolt. But in the end

they failed, because they were useless and unnecessary upheavals, without permanence or beauty. Their claims were without point, their teachings without content, and their philosophy without grace or elegance.

Hassidism alone has succeeded as a great energizing and revitalizing spiritual impulse, bringing with it a wealth of ideas and ideals that brought fresh strength to old institutions and points the way to future development. The tiny spark thought to be dead, mounts high again, bringing fresh hope and courage to those who despaired of it. Hassidism is no longer the great and powerful movement which once it was. Time and circumstances have dealt hard with it. The first enthusiasm has died out; its ranks are thinned, its membership dwindled and, generally, it may be said to have reached a point of stagnation. Yet, the fire is still burning. Hearts are warmed by the beauty and magic of its teachings, and in the very countries it was held up to ridicule there are signs of a revival of its faith. Pen and brush have been pressed into its service, and to poet and artist it is a source of inspiration. From pulpit and platform its doctrine is being proclaimed, and books appear in abundance to explain it, expound it and clarify it.

Hassidism has withstood the test of stability. It is not a temporary infatuation that this movement has brought into the Jewish world, but a conviction that has endured the trials and hardships of adverse circumstances. It has vindicated its claim to stability by being the only Jewish movement to survive the test of two hundred years. There have been more Jewish movements in the last two hundred years than in the past two thousand. Panaceas of all sorts—Aufklährung, Emancipation and Haskalah—have played their little part and disappeared amid clouds of disappointment and disillusionment, but the doctrine of the simple peasant teacher of Medziboz has survived.

Like Judaism itself, Hassidism possesses the element of adjustability. The religious program of one section of

Jewry has proven a snare and a delusion to other Jews, but the platform that Hassidism has provided has bridged the gulf between the East and the West. It is a program not of division but cohesion, not of separation but unity. More stable than the German Enlightenment, more enduring than the Russian or Polish Haskalah, more lasting than the creeds and panaceas of two hundred years, Hassidism has taught a faith which has warmed and inspired thousands of Jews in all lands and under all conditions of life.

II

Hassidism has also met the test of utility. Superstition may survive, fanaticism may endure. Indeed, it would seem as though they were the only things that are endowed with amazing vitality. Endurance is an inadequate standard of the use and value of an ideal. The Egyptian pyramids are stable; the colossal structures of Stonehenge have survived the physical upheavals of the centuries. It is only when stability is accompanied by utility and service that its worth and value are proven.

Utility is the measure by which Hassidism would want to be judged. It has brought the gifts of joy and hope to thousands of Jews who were living in spiritual desperation. The conditions under which they found themselves spread a cloud of gloom which held out little hope. Between the purse-proud Jews of the cities and the Talmud-proud Jews of the learned academies, the poor and simple village folk almost despaired of their share in the Jewish heritage. Only the scholars and the intellectuals held the key to the Torah; they alone knew what was allowed and what was forbidden, what was permitted and what was proscribed, the rest were like the dumb cattle fit only for the plough. Fear of sin dominated the life of the Jews, and where there is fear there is no freedom and the creative spirit can take no root. The least infraction of the precepts of the Torah threatened to plunge them into

eternal torment. A gloomy consciousness of guilt which frequently passed over into settled melancholy spread its dark wings over thousands of hearts, creating a nervous condition with menacing consequences.

Under Hassidism life was divested of its terrors. In its mystic atmosphere Jews ceased to despair and breathed more freely again. A new hope was revived in them. They no longer lived under the weight of sin and guilt. There was joy in being a Jew. They knew that God was with them even in their failings. Pious ecstasy made up for their lack of knowledge of the Torah. The holy tomes of the Talmud were closed to them, but faith in their saints filled them with a sense of peace and security. Overstrung nerves were relaxed as fear and terror were removed.

It was the first time that democracy broke through the barriers of the ghetto caste-system. "There is no doubt," writes Chaim Zhitlowsky in his introduction to "The Dybbuk," "that Chassidism exerted a powerful influence for democracy wherever it was established. Old caste distinction between the learned and the ignorant, between the poor and the rich, vanished. . . . It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the new doctrine gained instantly victory over the old order of things, and so rapidly became the most potent force in the lives of the Jews of Eastern Europe." [1]

Now, it may be true that Hassidism was not the first to foster democracy among the Jews, for the two had been for a long time on intimate terms. But the pre-Hassidic democracy was a democracy of the Torah that conferred nobility upon the humblest beggar. It was a democracy which, in the course of time, was hardened into an aristocracy that was as proud and insolent as aristocracy can be. Not such was the democracy that Baal Shem had brought into being. It was a democracy without qualifications and distinctions, without titles and divisions, but one that was natural, native and inalienable,

based on no other rights than that its possessor was a human being. Such was the philosophy that Hassidism inspired. It answers the demand of stability as proven by its record of two hundred years existence. It meets the claims of utility by the impulse of new life it breathed into hearts that were without joy, without hope, without a future.

III

Likewise, the claims of beauty must be satisfied if a cause or a movement is to prove its worth or value to humanity. Endurance and utility may become gross and vulgar when not redeemed by the saving grace of beauty. Symmetry of shape and form must blend with the physical qualities if they are to answer the highest demands of art. This is true of fine architecture; it is still more true of the finer and subtler things of the spirit. The lack of beauty has been a fatal flaw in causes and movements that clamored for the attention of the world. Religion in particular cannot ignore the claims of the æsthetic sense. It must not offend the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful if its domain over the human heart is to be established. Grossness is an idolatry which the finer human sensibilities whip with their displeasure. It cannot reside in the temple set apart for the holiest impulses of the heart.

The great religious movements of the world understood and honored this natural impulse for beauty. They swayed and ruled the world not so much by their theology as by the sense of reverence and wonder they aroused. They provided the impulse which gave wings to the poet, brush to the artist, and speech to writer, thinker and philosopher. They became the source of a multitude of new ideas that served as a progressive, even revolutionary, incentive to the world.

How does Hassidism meet the challenge of the æsthetic ideal? What has been the creative force of the move-

ment already two hundred years old? Besides service and endurance, what sense of beauty has the Hassidic movement given to thinker, artist and poet that it should deserve the admiration and gratitude of mankind? The critics and opponents of Hassidism will say: None at all. They remember the crude beginnings of the sect and despair of its future. They observe the outwardly unlovely form of its founder and doubt that any good will ever come from a source such as that. They have seen the devotees of Hassidism portrayed on the stage; their long caftans, their trembling curls, the strange intonation of the voice, and wild gesticulation of their hands, and are repelled by their appearance. Yet it may be maintained that, whatever claims Hassidism has on the future, they will be based on no more valid grounds than the new grace and beauty it has brought into the life of the Jewish people. In its almost primitive crudeness, genius has discovered a fertile field for artistic expression. The stage has been enriched by Hassidism; music has been inspired by it, and dancing, the most subtle and exquisite of the fine arts, received a new impulse from the strange and curious movements of the adherents of this sect.

Beauty has in a large measure disappeared from the Jewish household during the past two thousand years. The æsthetic sense of the Jew might be said to have died with the last line of the Bible. A people that had had to strain its every sense for mere physical survival could find little time for the cultivation of the finer graces of life. Even those practices of the home and the synagogue, inherently beautiful, have become, in the course of time, coarse and commonplace.

In the mystical atmosphere Hassidism created, the sense of wonder and beauty was restored to the Jew. Miracles of every kind were daily events in the entourage of the Hassidic saints. They were no longer a thing of the past, but commonplaces in every Zaddik's home. Whether seriously or humorously, the celebrated Rabbi

of Ladi reported that in the house of his master "marvels strewed the floor of his room." And, where there is wonder there is also art. Music and dancing are cognate arts of the stage. The overflowing joyousness of the Hassid found expression in the things in which joy is always to be found. Gloom flies where song and dance are in the air. Voice and muscle are relaxed when fear disappears. It is thus that Hassidism, which successfully passed the first two tests, namely, those of stability and utility, also vindicated its claim to beauty.

IV

The ancient Jews seem to have known nothing of the drama. Although there are dramatic elements in the Bible, there is no dramatic action. The Bible contains almost all the known literary forms—lyrical, epic and narrative—but drama is not one of them. In this, as in many other respects, the Jews differed from the Greeks, whose whole life was dominated by the gymnasium, the hippodrome and the theater. What little the Jews knew of the theater came to them from the Greeks, and the theater was at that time no longer the chaste and pure institution to invite the Jews to emulate it.[2]

There is at least one book in the Bible—the Book of Job—that possesses all the elements of the dramatic art, but the Jewish origin of even this dramatic poem has been seriously questioned. During the Middle Ages the Jews had satires and parodies which playfully caricatured Bible characters and events, but no dramas. The reason for this neglect is not far to seek. Drama requires action and the life of the Jews was too confined and circumscribed to create drama. The history of the Jewish stage is, therefore, a purely modern production. It arose during the last quarter of the nineteenth century under the influence of emancipation. It is barely more than a half a century old and it came under the impulse of Hassidism.

The influence of J. L. Perez was far-reaching. As Has-

sidism may be said to have provided the impulse to the modern Hebrew satire, the privilege may be claimed for it of having also stood at the birth of the Yiddish drama. The Yiddish theater owes its origin to a variety of causes and circumstances, but the Hassidic contribution must not be overlooked. If Hassidism did not create the Jewish stage, it contributed much to its amusement. The Yiddish theater sprang directly from the very heart of the people and it reflected all their passions and prejudices.[3]

There is no department of activity where Hassid-baiting has been more persistent and popular than on the Jewish stage. It was a pastime at which all the Jewish playwrights tried their hand. However mediocre the play and unimaginative the actors, there was always a clown, invariably labelled a Hassid, who could be relied upon to relieve the dullness of the performance. It was a tradition that was faithfully carried on by the Jewish dramatists, who handed it down to their successors with utter disregard of the truth and disdain of human feelings. Taking their cue from the Haskalah fanatics the Yiddish play-makers made the Hassid strut the stage as an uncouth, unlovely, stammering caricature of a man, a hypocritical, sinister being, bent upon evil-doing, without a nobler impulse stirring his cold and dark heart.

It was by no mere accident that Anski stumbled on the "The Dybbuk" legend.[4] Anski was a poet, a socialist, a revolutionary who had long since emancipated himself from the prejudices and pettiness of the Hebrew intellectuals. He was a collector of folk-legends who was intrigued by the Hassidim world that Perez had discovered. He probed for beauty where the exterior was uncouth and repellent, for truth where outwardly there was nothing but sham and superstition; and when the story of the Dybbuk fell into his lap, he knew that he had the germ of an exquisite dramatic idea.

The story of "The Dybbuk" certainly does not need to be retold. It was one of the most frequented plays of

the Jewish theater and was played in Yiddish, Hebrew and English simultaneously. Never was such a drama seen on the Jewish stage. "The Dybbuk" marks a change in the world's estimate of Hassidism. It is not a drama that concerns itself with the problem of an individual soul, but one that portrays the mystic longing and ecstasy of a great religious sect. It makes Hassidism live again in all its spiritual grandeur and fantastic beauty, in all its uncouth loveliness and mystic faith. "The Dybbuk" is the epic of Hassidism as Bialik's poem, *Hamathmid,* is the epic of Rabbinism. It atones for all the sins and prejudice with which this movement had been treated. Were Hassidism to disappear and Hassidim be no more, their spirit could be resurrected and made to live again by the sheer power of this play.

Almost all the elements of the Hassidic atmosphere are symbolized in the drama: the dimly lighted synagogue whose walls are black and damp with the tears of generations; the Hassidim who sit there, half-starved individuals, whose dark eyes burn with the faith and passion of their people. Sender, a rich and purse-proud Jew, comes in to announce the betrothal of his daughter. He calls for refreshments and dancing, according to the manner of the Hassidim. Hunger and desperation are soon forgotten. Feet are raised, normal attitude assumed, bodies grow erect, hands are joined. They dance on and on. Sender calls for more and more dancing. The pace of the dancers grows faster and faster. Everybody is caught up in the mad whirl of the dance. Coat-tails fly in the air and the feet seem never to touch the earth.

The wedding approaches. A banquet is spread for the poor. Then more dancing. This time it is the dance of the beggars, a weird, angular dance like a rattle of dry bones, grotesque yet fascinating, till Leah, half-pleased, half-terrified, becomes exhausted and swoons. The bride goes to the cemetery, according to Hassidic custom, to invite the soul of her dead mother to attend her wed-

ding. The Messenger tells her that the souls of those who had died before their time, live on in new incarnations and are sometimes assimilated in the bodies of living people. Leah understands and invites the soul of her dead lover, Hanan.

Azariel, the Zaddik of Miropol, appears, a man spent by fasts and penitential exercises. He feels himself unequal to the great task of exorcising the Dybbuk. "Who am I," he cries, "a poor mortal, that all the woes and sorrows of the world should be brought to me?" But he quickly gathers strength from the thought that a Jewish soul is to be saved. Then comes the weird Hassidic ceremony of expelling the evil spirit, accompanied by the rituals of scrolls, candles and robes, one of the most fantastic, yet impressive spectacles seen on the Jewish stage.

It is a vanishing world, a fleeting, forgotten dream that Anski recaptured for the stage. Its men and women, with their thwarted lives and twisted souls, are as though they had arisen from their graves. We see them in their pettiness and greatness, in their fanaticism and sincerity, in their filthiness and glamour. It is a monument of enduring strength and beauty that Anski had built in honor of a sect that was mocked and taunted, parodied and mimicked. The work that Perez had begun, Anski completed. Both of these men, one in fiction and the other in the drama, have written credentials for Hassidism that are honored by all the world.

V

"Yoshe Kalb" [5] does not move on the same exalted plane as "The Dybbuk." It harks back to the Haskalah rather than to Perez. It is a drama of realism. It is a protest against the idealization of a creed which, despite its inherent beauty and spiritual warmth, has brought great sorrow and suffering to the people who professed it. Its men and women, its atmosphere and temperament move on a lower plane than that of the "The Dybbuk."

There may be occasional flashes of genuine greatness in the types and characters the play portrays, but, on the whole, they are gross and vulgar, coarse and repellent. There is sham in their religion, hypocrisy in their piety, and worldliness in their professed spirituality. Its saints and teachers, its leaders and officials are interested not in their people but in themselves. They built altars not to God but to themselves, so that they might be adored and deified, worshipped, fed and fattened from the toil and labor of their blind believers.

After "The Dybbuk," "Yoshe Kalb" comes as a great shock, as though one saw a great ideal dragged into the very mire. The disappointment is keen and painful. But one must remember that the two represent a complete picture of Hassidism, one portraying the purity and idealism of the movement, the other its decadence and degeneracy. One symbolizes the creation of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob, the other depicts the product of the stupid, blundering and plundering men who came after him. Azariel and Elimelekh depict by contrast the greatness and pathos of a movement that aimed so high and aspired so nobly, but which fell in the end into coarse and gross worldliness. Anski was the poet of Hassidism and Singer is its realist. One beheld the grandeur of its faith, the other its destruction. The warming gleam which brought cheer and happiness to thousands, ended in fanaticism and delusion, bringing with it nothing but sorrow and disappointment.

VI

"Through the unfathomable depths of space wander countless stars, luminous thoughts of God, blest instruments on which the Creator plays. They are all happy—for God desires a happy world." This is the creed of the Hassid. This is his religion. He knows no other faith than joy. "Serve God in gladness" [52a] is to him not a text in the Bible, but very life. Music is the natural concomi-

tant of joy. It fills the heart with a holy ecstasy of unearthly happiness. Music is not only religious but is religion. In olden times men did not pray to God, but sang. Songs without words preceded the verbal utterance of prayer. "All melodies," said a Hassidic saint, "are derived from a source of sanctity, from the Temple of Song. Impurity knows no joy, for it is the source of all melancholy." [6]

Song is not a stranger in the midst of the Jewish people. It is no accident that the Bible has labelled one of its books "The Song of Songs." Jubal was distinguished as "the father of all such as handle the harp and lyre" [7] as long as five thousand years ago. Jewish worship not only did not dispense with music but was at the very core of it. The Priests and the Levites chanted their prayers as we are to-day reciting them. Heaven was to the Jew a realm whose gates could open only by means of song and melody. The very tetragrammaton that spells out the name of God is said by a Hassidic saint to be composed of the notes of melody. Processional music was the form of the Temple service. The statutes of the Torah were conceived as songs by the Hebrew poet-king David.[8] A harp, tradition tells, hung over the head of King David's bed, which, at midnight, touched by the gentle west wind began to vibrate and emit sweet music, at which the monarch, rising from his sleep, would spend the rest of the night in song and study.[9] Cantillation, a Judaic sacred chant, is the manner in which Jewish law prescribes the reading of the Torah.

Never has the voice of song been entirely hushed in the midst of Israel. On all occasions the Jewish heart was attuned to the strains of melody. Sometimes it was a happy and jubilant song, at other times it was a wailing and broken tune. But, whether in joy or sorrow, whether in victory or defeat, their experiences were always wedded to music. During the Dark Ages and in modern times, though unwelcomed in several provinces of the fine

arts, the Jew had floods of melody to inform the flinty world that he was living, believing, suffering, sorrowing, hoping and dreaming. It was only when song became the frivolous pastime of the epicurean that the rabbis stamped it as "the way of the Gentiles," and banished it from the Jewish heart and home.

Not only was melody honored by the Jews, but they were the first to sense the pathological value of music, thus anticipating the modern findings on the subject by several thousand years. When King Saul ceased to commune with God and was troubled by an evil spirit, his servants begged him to allow them to "seek out a man who is cunning with the harp; for it shall come to pass that when an evil spirit is upon thee, he shall play with his hands and thou shalt be well." [10]

Returning heroes were welcomed with the strains of music; great national deliverances were celebrated by choruses of singing men and women; the Solomonic Temple resounded with hymns and psalms, and there are musical notes even for the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The harp of Zion, hung upon the weeds of the rivers of Babylon, did not remain there for very long, for, in captivity as well as in restoration, its strings were touched to new music.

The synagogue has preserved the musical tradition of the Jews for two thousand years, although in a greatly altered form. The Jews had no musical notes, or if they had, their record has been irretrievably lost. The synagogue worship is wedded to a chant which is unlike the original Temple service, although authorities maintain that it is based on the cantillation notes of the Torah reading which is itself of considerable antiquity. As was the life of the Jew, so was also his music. Its joyous and triumphant notes gave way to melodies that were austere and solemn, full of tears and agony. "How can we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?" [11] And, "My harp was turned to mourning, and my pipe to wailing." [12]

VII

Under the influence of Hassidism, however, the kingdom of song was restored to the Jew. What study is to the Mithnagid, song is to the Hassid. Melody creates for him a mood of pious ecstasy. It exalts him; it uplifts him; it fills him with a sort of unearthliness which loses itself in the infinite En-Sof. Melody stood at the cradle of the Kabbalah. It witnessed its birth and rise. It surrounded it with that mystic yearning that touches the hearts of its devotees to this day. As the Kabbalah was born in Palestine, so were also its first melodies. Rabbi Isaac Luria was the author and composer of few Kabbalistic tunes which are sung by the Zaddikim and their followers to this day. They are fantastic, they are mystical, full of the languor and longing of the East where they were born.

When the Kabbalah moved westward, its songs took on the color and character of their environment, becoming even sadder and gloomier than before. The life of the Jew was hard and his songs reflected the extent and nature of his suffering. Under Christian influence Jewish melody rested its wings. There was no longer the liberal and tolerant Mohammedan rule under which the Kabbalah reached its highest development, to quicken the lyre to song. The old hymns of Safed were repeated without making new additions to the repertory. They were mostly synagogue hymns reflecting the fervor and passion of the new faith. These were sharpened and deepened with greater feeling and intensity to voice the new spiritual experiences of the singers. It was not, however, until the coming of Hassidism, the legitimate heir of the Kabbalah, that a new type of Jewish music was born.

Hassidism may be defined as the religion of song and melody. The ecstasy of melody is the key with which it strives to unlock the gates of heaven. Music was the native, inborn gift of almost all its early teachers. Baal Shem was known to have composed his own melodies;

Levi Isaac of Berditchev was a prolific author of tunes; the Rabbi of Ladi was the composer of the famous "The Rebbe's Song," and Nahman Bratzlav was perhaps the greatest poet of the Hassidic sect. He loved music with that passion and earnestness which made him sense the accents of melody in every object of nature. Trees, grass, flowers, the very limbs of the human body, were to him vocal with song. "Every science," he said, "every religion, every philosophy, even atheism, has its own pattern of song. The higher the religion or the science, the more exalted its music." [13] There are mansions in heaven, says the Zohar, that can be approached only by song. Some Zaddikim believed that they could attain more by music than by prayer.[14] Phinehas of Koretz declared that melody precedes repentance, and the Gerer Zaddik observed regretfully to his Hassidim, "Were I blessed with a sweet and beautiful voice, I could sing for you new hymns every day, for with the daily rejuvenation of the world new songs are being created." [15]

Although some of the Hassidic melodies had words wedded to their tunes, many of them were songs without words. It was the mood and state of mind created by a song that was prized high, not its words. The hymns and melodies, sung or hummed all over the world, have never been clothed in words. Indeed, the Hassidim seem to be skeptical of words when applied to melody. They believe that words interrupt the smooth and even flow of a tune and prevent it from reaching a state of rapture.

VIII

The Hassidim were not particular about the source or origin whence their melodies were derived. They took them wherever they could find them. They believed that the motive and purpose to which the songs were put, sanctified their humble birth. While many of the Hassidic tunes have come from the synagogue, many others had a less distinguished source. The place and circumstances

under which the Hassidim lived play an important part in the history of their songs. Thus, Wallachian peasants, Cossack herdsmen, military marches and love songs gave theme and inspiration to many Hassidic melodies. These, of course, were reworked and reshaped; sacred tunes were put into secular motifs till they were made into songs fit for heaven.[16]

Melody was the torch that lighted up every Hassidic gathering. Whether at the court of the Zaddik or in the synagogue, whether meeting privately or at a sacred ceremony, music was the regular feature of every Hassidic entertainment. It livened up the meeting and spread an atmosphere of festivity over the most commonplace occasion. As already stated, many of the Zaddikim were excellent musicians and composed songs and created their own melodies. Such men stood in the highest regard of their followers. To possess a good and pleasing voice was as great an asset to a Zaddik as learning was to the Mithnagdic rabbi. But when this gift could not be claimed by him, the custom was to employ a court-singer, whose duty it was, besides leading the faithful ones in singing at the ceremonial Sabbath meal, to study the mood and temper of his superior and translate them into songs. Such function required a musical talent of the highest sort. Such a court-singer was not only director and choir leader, but a composer and psychologist as well. The tunes he composed or acquired were carefully studied, rehearsed and repeated with great gusto and fervor on the Sabbath and holidays. It is thus that, while there are some Hassidic melodies that are universal, it was customary for every court to have its own style of singing, so that Hassidic affiliations could often be gauged by the melodies. Not all the Zaddikim liked the same kind of music. Some had a preference for emotional and ecstatic music, and others delighted in lyrical and sentimental style, while still others thrilled to the tunes of military marches.

Professor A. Z. Idelsohn,[17] an authority on Jewish

music, makes the interesting observation that, just as there are two different schools of Hassidism, the emotional and the philosophical, Baal Shem having been the founder of the one and Sheneir Zalman of the other, so there are also two distinct types of Hassidic melodies: the ecstatic and the reflective, the joyous and the mystical. A strong, rhythmic melody luring one to dance, is characteristic of the first; a more subdued, pensive, rapturous and yearning tone is the theme of the second group. *Simha,* "Joy," is the feature of the Beshtian school, *Debekuth,* "Submergence into the Divinity," is the characteristic of the Habad Hassidim.

Under the impulse of Hassidism a new type of Jewish music came into being. While the music of the *Mithnagdim* runs into *Hazanuth,* "cantorial," the ritual style of the synagogue, with little change or variation, the music of the Hassidim is original, creative and spontaneous. One is crude and antiquated, little departing from the original Torah cantillation; the other is full of rhythm and color, a style of music that sprang from the very hearts of the people, possessing all the elements of musical composition. Whatever there may be in store for the future development of Jewish music, it is the opinion of many authorities on the subject that it will be cradled in the melodies of the Hassidic songs. Great musical composers have already responded to it. In the hands of men like Saminsky, Ernst Bloch and Joseph Achron, Hassidic music has already given the impulse to great musical compositions and it is predicted that it will hold out still greater promise in the future.

IX

Dancing is religion conceived rhythmically. It is the coördination of the physical faculties with the feeling of ecstasy. It is that self-forgetful union with the not-self which is the highest form of religion. A dim vision of its rapturous and intoxicating effect must have already been

present in the mind of the Hebrew poet-king when he exclaimed, "All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee?" [18]

In olden times dancing was as much part of religion as prayer. In fact, among the primitive tribes it *is* prayer. As an anthropologist has put it, "The savage does not preach his religion; he dances it." Dancing is to the savage the magical operation for the attainment of whatever favors he wishes to receive from his gods. Says H. Havelock Ellis: "To dance was at once to worship and to pray. Just as we find in our Prayer-Books that there are divine services for all the great fundamental acts of life, for birth, for marriage, for death," so "for all the solemn occasions of life, for bridals, for funerals, or seed-time and for harvest, for war and for peace, for all these things there were fitting dances." [19]

The drama is action fitted to words. The Greek drama was a ritualistic dance that preceded the sacrifice. It is in fact what all dancing was in the early days of the race before the dance as a social and dramatic expression grew out from the ceremonial and religious. During the Middle Ages the dance passed over into the mystery play which stood in high esteem in the Christian Church. The dances were sometimes ecstatic, sometimes pantomimic, but were always executed with high religious fervor. Religion lost much of its freshness and spontaneity when dancing was discontinued as part of its exercises.

Although dancing among the early Hebrews has never attained to the dignity of a ritualistic exercise as among other nations, it was nevertheless one of their popular pastimes. From the very beginning it seems to have played an important and intimate part in the life of the people. Frequent reference is made to it in the earliest narratives of the Jews. It was one of the compensations for their lack of invention and ability in the other fine arts. Common tasks were made lighter by a chant; a popular celebration was rendered more joyous by the

rhythmic movements of a dance. The Israelites of that period were a light-hearted people, quick, impetuous, pleasure-loving, an instrument easy to play upon, and the dance gave them an opportunity for the expression of their intensity of feeling.

Every important public event, a victory in war, a great national deliverance, the returning of a hero, the observance of a festival, a general rejoicing, furnished the occasion for inviting the people to dance. The exodus from Egypt was celebrated by timbrels and dancing; the Bible preserved the memory of religious dances in connection with the golden calf; Jephtha's daughter went out to meet her triumphant father with "timbrels and dancing"; the women of the cities of Israel came out to welcome Saul after his victory over the Philistines with singing and dancing; King David set aside his royal dignity and danced and made merry before the Ark of the Lord.[20] In almost all these instances it was the women who took the initiative, bounding forth with their gaily trimmed tambourines to tread the measures of their dance in which the men joined, clapping their hands and stamping their feet.

The records of their dances have unfortunately been lost and we do not know whether the Jews of Palestine had ever succeeded in developing a dance that was as characteristically Hebraic as their style of literature. It is, therefore, impossible to reconstruct the ancient Jewish dance, if there ever was one that was typically Jewish. But its character may be derived from the Hebrew terms for dancing which signify leaping, circling, turning and making merry. Tradition preserved the record of public celebrations being made happier by the files of gay, tripping maidens, striking their timbrels and inviting their male companions to join them in their dances. The fifteenth day of Ab and the Day of Atonement were particularly striking for the gay enchantresses of Palestine, who, without blush or shame, lured on the men to behold

their attractive loveliness.[21] The "marriage dance" was regarded with great favor by the Jews, and it survived the destruction of the Temple. To dance before the bride was held a pious act, and great rabbis frequently indulged in it.[22] It was only in the days when the Greek immoralities menaced the very existence of Judaism that dancing, especially by professional and probably lewd women, lost its high standing and was looked upon with disfavor.

X

There was little temptation to dancing in the Middle Ages, when joy was a stranger in the Jewish habitations. Whatever dancing there was, was probably limited to weddings and the holiday known as "Rejoicing with the Torah." The Jews, not having developed a style of dancing of their own, borrowed their dances, as they did their music, from the peoples among whom they lived. They were peasant dances and, on the whole, without grace or color. The synagogue became an austere and solemn place where people gathered to pray and to contemplate the serious and solemn thoughts of life and death. Its brooding atmosphere was never disturbed by any such gay and "frivolous" exercise as dancing. As a ritualistic exercise, dancing was thus banished from the synagogue with little hope of its ever returning to it again.

It was, however, impossible that the atmosphere Hassidism had breathed into Judaism, finding expression in music, should neglect its natural companion, dancing. The same impulse that relaxed the muscles of the vocal cords, set also the limbs in motion. Although Hassidism has not been as original in the art of dancing as it was in music, it nevertheless created a rhythmic swaying of the body that expresses the ecstatic Hassidic temperament. While the Hassidim did not dance their prayers, they made dancing an indispensable part of the synagogue ritual. Intriguing tunes led to mass exaltation that almost always expressed itself in gesticulating dancing. And their dance, like their music, is more of a mood than a rhythm,

more of a prayer than an art. It is the expression of their unsuppressed spiritual exaltation that is too intimate, too deep, too overflowing to be restrained.

Hassidim dance as they sing whenever and wherever they meet, at the Rebbe's court, at social gatherings and on festive occasions. Music and brandy relax the feet for dancing. But it is especially in the synagogue where the dance assumes the character of a religious ritual. Writes I. Wassilevsky: "It often occurs that a party of Chassidim are seated round a table on a Sabbath or on the occasion of a festival. Their faces are glum and long, and their cheeks sunken, and their eyes full of sadness. Their lips are slightly twitching, their backs are bent, and their legs seem barely strong enough to support them. Each is overshadowed by his anxieties, personal and national; and these seem to pervade the atmosphere. Then, as if from nowhere, in the midst of conversation on everyday matters, a slight humming may be heard. Soon the melody which arises seems to permeate everybody. There is, indeed, the echo of a sob in it at first, but this is soon transformed to a hopeful chant, lamentation is turned to joy, despair to hope, which becomes faith, then trust, and then enthusiasm. Feet are raised, normal attitude assumed, bodies grow erect, hands are joined and a dance begins. . . . Their hearts seem to bask in the sun of love, everything is holy, good and beautiful, and they seem to be new men in body and in soul." [23]

It is thus that Hassidism has established its claim to the attention, even love, of the Jews. There is much in Hassidism that can revitalize the life of the Jews to-day, much that can be utilized for the artistic and spiritual creativeness of the Jewish people. It has given new wings to the poet and fresh impulse to the writer, thinker and dramatist. It has uncovered cultural vistas that were hitherto closed to them. It has spread a glamour of romance and poetry over a life that was cold and prosaic. When all this can be claimed for a movement the best that can be stated for it has been said.

Chapter XIV

LIFE OF A HASSID

In the beginning Hassidism was life, and it was free, creative and spontaneous. It burned like a phosphorescent flame in the hearts of its believers. Those were the classical days of the movement which history will remember as the golden age of Hassidism. But afterwards came blundering although well-meaning men, who wrote down its faith in books, embalmed it in doctrines, imprisoned it in a system, and argued, disputed and even fought over the possession and ownership of its truth, till its original force was spent and all that was left of its high-burning torch was a tiny, struggling flame.

A glimmer of what was going to happen must have already dawned on Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob, and this is the reason why he wrote no books and left no neatly ordered system. He derived his sanction from a higher authority than books. He taught and wrought not by documents but by torches that burned themselves into the hearts of the faithful. He mistrusted books and but rarely committed anything to writing. He knew how tyrannical the power of books may become and how men fought and killed one another over the meaning and interpretation of their words. When he heard one day that one of his disciples committed the indiscretion of putting down his words on paper, he not only rebuked him, but repudiated everything he had written.

It was not the intention of Rabbi Israel to found a new sect, to make a new covenant, to create a new brotherhood, or do anything which might contribute to the

divisiveness of the Jewish household. Whatever changes were implied in the teachings of Hassidism were inward not outward, internal not external. It called for a changed heart, not for a change in the community organization. It tried to influence the individual Jew, not the status of the community. Nothing that was calculated to disturb the unity of the Jewish people has ever been reported in the name of Rabbi Israel or any of his immediate disciples. Even when the floods of oppression and persecution mounted high, the accredited leaders of Hassidism preached not hate or vengeance, but unity and coöperation with their fellow Jews.

If in the course of time this unity was broken and the Hassidim felt themselves called upon to develop their own community life, it was not inspired by the teachings of Hassidism, but was the result of the conditions and circumstances under which the movement was born. Although Hassidim and Mighnagdim were members of the same faith, the religious differences between them were so great and important as to make them unlike each other in their views and outlook upon Jewish life. One is cold and prosaic, the other is ecstatic and mystical; one believes in authority and tradition, the other in freedom and spontaneity; one adheres to fixed rules and forms, the other follows the rule of the heart; learning and education is the passion of one, worship and holiness is the way of the other.

The Hassidim observe no fixed hours of worship. They let their mood rather than law govern their approach to God. They are loud and demonstrative in their prayers. They do not conform to the conventional practices of the synagogue. They feel themselves free with their Maker. They follow a ritual that is not of the established custom of the synagogues of the Mithnagdim. These differences set the Hassidim apart from their fellow Jews, creating from the very beginning quarrels and disputes among them. The unlike invited dislike. The synagogue, no

longer able to hold the two groups together, the Hassidim found themselves compelled to organize their own houses of worship.

Spiritual leadership occupies among the Hassidim a different position than among their opponents. Among the Mithnagdim its functions are discharged by the traditional rabbi who combines the offices of leader, scholar, judge, arbitrator, ritual authority, counsellor, and general city high official. Although elected by the community, his rule is by the authority of the Torah.

A much more modest dignitary is the spiritual leader of the Hassidic community. He is called not rabbi but MaZ, the first and last letters of the word spelling out in abbreviation the Hebrew words, *Moreh Zeddek,* or "Righteous Teacher." He differs from his Mithnagdic counterpart not only in name but in his place and function in the community. He is neither preacher nor judge, neither counsellor nor arbitrator, and even his scholarship need not be of the highest order. The decision of domestic ritual questions and piety are his only occupations, and his appointment is not by the community but by the Rebbe or Zaddik, who is the supreme master of the far-flung Hassidic dominion under his jurisdiction.[1]

The education of the young is held in high esteem in Hassidism, but it is an education that is intensive, not extensive, making not for scholarship but character. The Hassidim realize that the success and future of their movement depend upon the young; it is, therefore, their greatest aim and ambition to surround them with the ideals and influence of their faith. While the Mithnagid chooses a teacher for his child with a reputation for learning, the Hassid, although he does not frown upon the scholarly attainments of his son's pedagogue, will employ the greatest care to assure himself of the teacher's piety. Wherever possible, he will look among his own fellow believers, preferably those belonging to the followers of his own Zaddik, for an educator for his children.

Having been denied the social intercourse of their fellow Jews from the very beginning, in many instances hunted, persecuted and treated like outcasts, the Hassidim early learned to depend on their own brotherhood for their social life, thus constituting a community within a community wherever Hassidim and Mithnagdim were found living together. While their social diversions are mainly carried on in the synagogue, which serves both as a house of worship and community center, the habit of visiting one another is frequently practiced by them.

Although charity is dispensed by the Hassidim with a rich and generous hand, they do not as a rule belong to the charity institutions of the community. It rarely happens that a Hassid applies to the charity chest of the community in which he lives for assistance.[2] Moses Hess understood the charity instinct of the Hassidim well when he said, "Although the Chassidim are without social organization, they live in socialistic fashion. The house of the rich man is always open to the poor and the latter is as much at home there as he is in his own house. They seem to have taken as their motto the saying in Aboth, 'He who says what is mine is thine is a saint.' "[3] "The meanest beggar," says Chaim Zhitlowsky, who knew his Hassidim well, "might enter the most sumptuous room and lie with muddy boots upon the sofa, and, without let or hindrance, order the rich man about as though he was his own brother."[4]

Although the real home of the Hassid is not the town where he lives, does his business and rears his family, but the place of his Zaddik although it may be hundreds of miles away, he is, nevertheless, not indifferent to the affairs of the city of his residence. Early experience, when Hassidim were excluded from every form of community activity, taught him to develop a sort of community-mindedness. He is zealous for the representation of the members of his group in all community matters, and when this is denied him he will often form a com-

munity organization of his own, with special taxation for the support of such matters as the salaries of the rabbi and the "slaughterers," the maintenance of a public bath, etc. It was from questions such as these that discord, resulting in sad and bitter consequences, has often arisen.

It is thus that Hassidism, which sprang from its founder's heart as a religious ideal intended to unite the Jews instead of separating them, developed into a distinct sect, with an elaborate ritual and organization of its own, differing in many instances from the traditional Jewish community life, the resulting change affecting the inner as well as the outward life of the Hassidim, creating what might be called a Hassidic psychology. How this change came about, and the steps that were taken to accomplish it, will be the subject of the following pages.

II

As already suggested, Hassidism begins with the child. Long before he reaches maturity his status as a Hassid is already established. It comes, no doubt, from the home environment and the influence he imbibes in the synagogue whither he is taken by his father in his infancy, but more particularly it is the special training he receives that determines his caste-consciousness. While outwardly the Hassidic *Heder* does not materially differ from that of the Mithnagid, the difference lies in the ideal the two schools of instruction seek to serve and the steps taken to attain it.[5]

While the aim of the one is Talmudic learning, the goal of the other is piety and the fear of God. While the pupil of the Mithnagid is rushed with breath-taking speed from one branch of study to another—from reading to the Bible, from the Bible to Mishnah, from Mishnah to Gemarah, till, at a tender age, he can confound his learned elders with the sharpness of his wit and the readiness of his learned retorts, the child of the Hassid is trained more thoroughly in the cultivation of the duties

of the heart. "The hero of a Polish biography," writes Dr. Schechter, "at five years of age can recite by heart the most difficult tractates of the Talmud; at eight he is the disciple of the most celebrated teacher of his time, and perplexes him by the penetrative subtlety of his questions; while at thirteen, he appears before the world as a full-fledged Doctor of the Law." [6]

While stories and legends form no part of the education of the pupil of a Mithnagid, the Hassidic progeny is regaled with the miracle-stories of the Zaddikim, often spiced with *Nigunim,* or "melodies," which flow like honey through his youthful soul. Long and intricate legal disquisitions from the Talmud was the educational curriculum of the one, symbolic interpretations of the Bible or stories from the Zohar was the educational pabulum of the other. When the son of the Mithnagid left the Heder at the age of thirteen, he was a match for the best Talmud scholar, when the Hassidic pupil left school at the same age, his head was less stored with knowledge, but his heart was infinitely fuller and richer.

At Bar Mitzvah the Hassid took his son for the first time to the Rebbe. The boy wrote his first *Quittel,* "prayer-note," and paid the *Pidyon,* "redemption money." He was formally introduced to the Zaddik who blessed him. It was a rite which rounded out his education as a Hassid. He remained for some time at the Zaddik's court, mingled with the older folk, took his place at the ceremonial Sabbath meal and partook of all the customs and the exercises connected therewith. Leaving his home as a boy, he returned a full-fledged Hassid, the equal of any in his community. He was treated with deference by the other Hassidim, and they listened eagerly to the stories he brought back with him from the Zaddik's court.[7]

Celibacy found little encouragement among the Jews. Early marriages were favored by them for many reasons, but the economic factor must not be overlooked. Jewish

parents were as a rule too poor to support their children long past the age of adolescence, but the sons of the Hassidim are known to have been married at an even earlier age than that of Mithnagdim children.[8] They did not, however, stay long with their youthful brides; but, while the Mithnagdim went as *Perushim* to a Yeshibah, or Talmudic academy, where they perfected themselves in the knowledge of the Torah, the Hassidim made their pilgrimage to the Zaddik, in whose court they remained for several weeks or months.[9] When these visits lasted a longer period of time, they became known as *Yoshbim,* or "residents."

What was their occupation during this time? It was, first of all, a spiritual adventure such as they could not have gained anywhere else. They lived in an ecstatic environment in which their physical faculties were dissolved in other-worldliness. The visions of the Zaddik's life, of which they had either heard or read before, they now experienced personally. Although rapturous prayer was their principal occupation, they also steeped themselves in the study of the Zohar, read *Messilath Yesharim,* "The Path of the Righteous,"[10] and *Hobath ha-Leboboth,* "The Duties of the Heart," and the more learned among them also cultivated the study of the Talmud. They lived the hard and dangerous life of poverty. They slept on hard, wooden benches; their food, although poor, consisting for the most part of a thick soup with an occasional bone, with or without meat, was perhaps not much worse than the food of the average Jew in those times. As "residents" they were the guests of the Zaddik, the poor not being required to contribute for their own maintenance. They were also not without some pocket money, which came from the rich visitors to the court of the Zaddik. *Tikun,* or money contributed by these visitors for the improvement of their souls, was the name of the fund that covered the cost of maintaining the "residents" of the Zaddik's household.

Their life, however, was by far not as drab and uninteresting as might be imagined, for, aside from the ever-rich and colorful life of the Zaddik's court, they had their special amusements and diversions. These consisted of the regular and special holidays, of which there were many, as, for instance, birth and wedding days, circumcisions, Bar Mitzvahs and the death anniversaries of Zaddikim which were celebrated with as much pomp and splendor as the occasion and circumstances permitted. On these occasions the attachés of the Zaddik were not neglected, being made to join in the festivities. There were also rich visitors who came to announce the betrothal of a son or a daughter or the happy consummation of a profitable business deal, when they entertained with an especially lavish hand.

When his period of "residence" was over, the Hassid returned with the Rebbe's blessing to his wife, feeling himself ready to embark upon any business venture that came along. Far from regarding his apprenticeship at the Zaddik's court as wasted, the Hassid not only felt himself spiritually enriched, but he often turned the wide acquaintance he had made to profitable account. He heard of business opportunities, of vacancies in positions which he felt himself able to fill. The Rebbe was alert for such opportunities for his devoted Hassidim and lost no time in making the connections. It was thus that the child born in the Hassidic home was made to pass through a regimen of training from infancy to maturity and manhood, which hardened the education of childhood into life-long convictions.

III

The synagogue, or *Stibbel,* as the Hassidic house of worship is called, is to the Hassid what the *Beth ha-Midrash,* or "House of Study," is to the Mithnagid, except that it is not surrounded with the same dignity and awesomeness. Its name describes it; for the Hassid feels

himself at home there as in his own *Stube,* or "house." [11] In the Hassidic house of worship there is not the same official solemnity as in the traditional synagogue. There are no partitions between the Hassid and his God; he does not feel that he must don his holiday clothes when he approaches His sanctuary. It is a poor and modest affair, sometimes a ramshackle building, not as sumptuous a structure as the Mithnagid builds for his God. Whatever dignity there is, is made of living and rapturous hearts, not of wood and stone. Its walls are often dark from soot and dust, and at night it is lit up by kerosene lamps or tallow candles. It is as poor and humble as is the life of those who come within its walls.

The Hassidic synagogue is a home and not a sanctuary, fulfilling for them all the functions of a home. It is an eating room, a sleeping room, a social center and a place of worship all in one. Its patrons gather there not only to commune with their God but also with their fellow Hassidim. The usual amenities of a synagogue are not observed there, and it is quite as often filled with the smoke of pipes or cigarettes as with the fervor of prayer. It is also a lodging place for impecunious travelers. It lacks the officialdom of the regular synagogue, as, for instance, Hazanim, who are regarded by Hassidim with especial disfavor. Their prayers are not solemn petitions but ecstatic poems, and whoever feels himself capable of "the lifting of the soul," may approach and lead the congregation in prayer.

Their prayers, always recited with devout and rapturous hearts, are usually short, being discharged with considerable speed. It is what follows after the services that makes the Hassidic synagogue so strange and unique a place for a house of worship. In the Mithnagdic synagogue instruction, or learning, follows the services. Whatever time the Mithnagid can spare from his struggle for existence he puts into study. Everybody goes to the *Beth ha-Midrash* for the knowledge of the Torah, and he who

cannot read its books himself listens to those who can. Not so it is in the Hassidic synagogue. While there may be some who are studiously inclined and take up after their prayers the Zohar, *Hok l'Yisroel,* or some other ethical treatise, intensive study, especially that of the Talmud, is not the habit of the Stibbel. Instead, groups are formed and conversation on the topics of the day, but more especially on the latest miraculous deeds of the Zaddikim, is indulged in. It is not uncommon for the conversation to revolve around the worldly magnificence of the Zaddik, his fabulous wealth, the "golden" carriages in which he rides, or the fine horses in his stables.[12] There may be present in their company a Hassid who has just returned from a visit to the Rebbe and he becomes a special object of solicitude, everybody listening to his stories with the greatest attention. It is to be noted, however, that the Rebbe is seldom mentioned by his name, but is spoken of as "Him," "Him" of so-and-so.

Spiritual self-intoxication is often accompanied in the Hassidic synagogue by physical, and spirituous drinks almost form a part of the services. A passion for alcohol has in this way developed among the Hassidim which, originally tolerated as means of producing cheerfulness and religious ecstasy, gradually became a regular feature of every Hassidic gathering. It was in vogue at the court of the Zaddik during the rush of the high holidays, and is indulged in after the synagogue services. There is always ample reason for festivities in the synagogues of the Hassidim. If it is not a birth, a betrothal, or a wedding, it is a death anniversary of a well-known Zaddik.

Death does not spell for Hassidim the same austerity and gloom as it does for the Mithnagdim, and the death of Zaddikim is commemorated not by fasting but feasting. The Hassidic synagogue is never so bright and illuminated as on the death anniversary of a Zaddik. They do not gather in their houses of worship to wail or mourn but to celebrate the "ascension" of his soul. After the

services, refreshments are served and they drink *l'Hayim,* or "to the life" of the departed saint, "whose meritorious deeds may shield us." Nothing that is sad and solemn is allowed to disturb the good humor of a Hassid. Untoward happenings which ordinarily spread a feeling of depression over the life of Mithnagdim, are turned in the Hassidic synagogues to occasions for joy and celebration.

It would be unjust to view the Hassid's indulgence in intoxicating beverages in the same light as the senseless drinking of the Russian or Polish peasants which, as a rule, transforms them into drunken beasts. The Hassid drinks in moderate doses, always "for the soul," to banish the grief that blunteth the heart, to arouse religious exultation and enliven social intercourse with his fellow Hassidim. It may be a delusion, but it accomplishes its end, for it helps to keep the Hassid's heart fresh and cheerful.[13]

IV

Annual pilgrimages to the Rebbe were not alone the privilege of the rich but the duty of all the Hassidim alike. Although special merit was attached to making such pilgrimages on foot, it was not uncommon for the wealthy Hassidim to assist their poorer brothers to make this journey. Since these visits were usually made before the high holidays, it was not difficult to guess their objective when one beheld a company of Jews traveling together. On these trips, the democratic nature of the Hassidim was especially marked. It was not an uncommon thing to see a rich Hassid dressed in expensive clothes approach a humbler Jew and ask where he was going; and when he learned that he was bent on the same mission, a bond of friendship was struck up with the least possible formality. The rich Hassid invited his poorer friend to join him in his carriage, to share his meals and stay in his lodgings.[14]

The very approach of the town where the Zaddik was

established filled one with a tense, warm atmosphere. There was something ecstatic in the very air of the town. Everybody knew everybody else. Men talked to one another without a formal introduction. It was as though they were coming for a family re-union. They shook hands with the greeting, *Shalom Alekhem,* "Peace unto You," and exchanged social amenities, inquiring after the health of the family or the state of one's business. If it was on a Friday or on the eve of a holiday that they came, they had to be economical with their time, for they had to secure lodgings and repair to the *Mikvah,* or ritual bath, in order to welcome Queen Sabbath or the festival, as the case might be, in a becoming way.[15]

To every Zaddik's court was attached a synagogue where the saint worshiped. This synagogue might be a modest or a sumptuous building, all according to the material standing of the Zaddik or the number and wealth of his followers. The Rebbe's ablutions, performed on Friday afternoon, were carried out with the regularity and minuteness of a religious rite. Upon returning from the bath, he lit the Sabbath candles, which were immediately put out and re-lit again by his wife, serving as a symbol for the advent of Queen Sabbath. Multitudes of Hassidim assembled themselves on the street to catch a glimpse of the Rebbe as he walked to the synagogue. At his approach they fell back and formed two lines as a kind of guard of honor, through which he passed slowly, preceded by a devotee who walked backwards facing the Rebbe, holding in his hand a cloth with which he dusted the stones the Zaddik's feet were to touch.[16]

Although the Zaddik worships with his Hassidim, he does not make himself part of them, for there is a little room in the synagogue, a special Holy of Holies, where he worships all by himself, keeping, however, in touch with the congregation by means of signs and signals which are conveyed to the reader, so that he may know when to begin and when to pause. On Sabbath morning when the

Rebbe is called to the Torah, one of the court officials motions to the congregation to rise. They open a lane through which the Zaddik passes to the pulpit, with his *Talith,* "prayer-shawl," drawn over his head, exposing only his eyes, so that no one may see his face. When *Minha,* or the first evening service, is over, *Kabbalath Sabbath,* the hymns welcoming Queen Sabbath are recited. When these are completed, the congregation crowd around the Rebbe, wishing him "Good Sabbath," a few of the bolder spirits shaking hands with him or touching their garments to his which they then hastily kiss. He then retires to his room for meditation, called *Hithbodeduth,* when no one may disturb him, in preparation for the community Sabbath meal.

While during the week the Rebbe eats alone, on the Sabbath and holidays he usually feasts with his Hassidim. The Friday night meal, called *Seudah Rishonah,* "the First Meal," or *Seudath Abraham Abinu,* "the Meal of our Father Abraham," is more of a rite than a feast, as in the interval the Hassidim had already broken bread at their lodgings or with their families. Upon reassembling, they find long tables set in the synagogue, with twelve *Haloth,* or special Sabbath bread, two large and ten smaller ones, symbolic of the like number of breads in the ancient Temple, placed at the head of the table where the holy one is enthroned.[17] A solemn atmosphere fills the place, the whole affair resembling a sacred religious exercise, the tables assuming the place of the altar, the meal of the sacrifice, and the Zaddik playing the part of the high priest of old.

Tense silence falls upon the assembled Hassidim. Not a word is spoken; not a sound is heard; one can almost feel his own breathing. Although many had not eaten all day, it is evident that it is not for the sumptuousness of the meal that they had gathered, for the food is served with almost Spartan-like simplicity, but for something higher. After washing his hands and pronouncing a bless-

ing, the Rebbe breaks one of the larger loaves and distributes the parts to those who sit near him. This serves as a sign that the meal has begun.

Large bowls of soup are served. Rich and poor alike reach for the same dish. While the Hassidim are eating, the Rebbe sits quiet, motionless, rigid as a statue. He eats little. He seems absorbed in other things. Platters of fish, the mystic Kabbalistic dish, are served. The Rebbe takes a piece with his hands, puts some to his mouth and motions to one of his court officials to remove the rest. Immediately there is bedlam. Everybody is pushing everybody else. Clothes are torn, hands are scratched, dignified Hassidim are scrambling to recover the hats which have fallen from their heads. Everyone is anxious to secure for himself a piece of the Rebbe's untasted fish. It is called *Shirayim,* or "Remains." It is not known how or when this rite developed. Christian scholars attribute its origin to the sacrament of the Church, but the analogy is unlikely.

The Hassidim return to their seats from the mêlées exhausted, panting, with their beards and sidelocks badly mutilated. It is on the whole a good-natured scuffle and the combatants are soon friends again. Meat is served, but this time the Hassidim eat their portions in silence. Wine or brandy is served. Although it is the ambition of every Hassid to toast the Rebbe's health, proposing the customary *l'Hayim,* to which he responds, *l'Hayim Tobim ul'Shalom,* "For a good and peaceful life," spirituous liquors are drunk with marked moderation at the Zaddik's table.

Someone strikes a tune. It may be one of the familiar Sabbath hymns, or a melody with or without words. Immediately all sing. It is fantastic. It is intoxicating. The room becomes wild with song. Even the Rebbe sings or hums, moving his head this way and that way. As a rule no Torah is "said" at this meal. A large glass of wine is handed to the Rebbe. He pronounces the pre-

scribed blessings; and, after tasting some of it, he hands back the goblet to the court servant who passes it on to the diners.[18]

The second Sabbath meal, *Seudah Shenith,* also called *Seudath Yitzhok Abinu,* "the Meal of our Father Isaac," is almost exactly like the first, except that it is served in the morning, usually at noon or one o'clock, right after the services. The Sabbath prayers are recited with the usual solemnities, the Zaddik often leading the congregation in the prayers himself. When these are over and the Hassidim greeted the saint with the customary "Good Sabbath," the latter again retires for seclusion lasting about two hours. In the meantime, the Hassidim regale themselves with refreshments, either at their homes or in the synagogue. At this meal it is the *Kugel,* the special Sabbath dish that is used for Shirayim. The same mad rush to get it, the same playful pranks and the same good humor when the ceremony is over.[19]

V

It is the third meal, *Seudah Shelishith,* or *Seudath Yaakob Abinu,* "the Meal of our Father Jacob," that has become especially celebrated among the Hassidim. Kabbalists attach great mystic value to this meal, because it is partaken at the departure of Queen Sabbath. Its ceremony begins right after the first evening service, or *Minha,* has been recited.

The sun casts its last purple rays through the windows of the synagogue. The shadows are falling on its walls. It is dark. Hearts are cramped with mystic awe and yearning. The Hassidim come to join the Rebbe for the last Sabbath meal. They resemble ghost-like creatures, these tense men with pale faces, dark eyes and swinging side-curls. The air is thick as though with visitors from another world. There is a feeling of holiness which is sensed in every nook and corner of the synagogue.

There is only one dish on the table—fish. But the

Hassidim eat little. It is getting still darker. They can only feel, not see each other. The Zaddik, his eyes closed, begins to recite a mystic hymn. It may be *Athkinu Seudatha,* or Luria's *Bene Hekhala,* and immediately one feels the singing, swaying bodies of the Hassidim, repeating the verses of the hymns line by line. The Rebbe again sits still. His hand covers his face. He seems miles away. It is already completely dark. But no one is stirring from his place. They want to prolong the hours of Queen Sabbath, to extend its dominion. For the Hassidim it is not enough that the Holy Sabbath should be observed, but its kingdom must be lengthened by additional hours. There are those poor, wretched sinners who are enjoying a brief respite from their tormentors in Gehenna while the Sabbath lasts and they want to help them.[20]

The magnet at these gatherings is the "Torah" the Hassidim expect to hear from their Rebbe. Preaching is not the habit of the Hassidic saints. The Rebbe's "Torah" closely resembles the traditional sermon, except that it is less involved and deals as a rule with the explanation of a part of the Bible that is fitting for the occasion. The Rebbe's standing and reputation with his flock depends on his "Torah." He is listened to like an oracle, with the greatest respect and awe. His words are repeated, weighed and analyzed for the secrets and mysteries they might reveal. Not only the words themselves, but the very expression on the Rebbe's face, the twinkling of his eyes, the gestures of his hands, the swaying of his body are carefully watched and followed for the light they may cast on the mystery of his words. The subtler the theme, the more obscure the meaning, the greater and holier is the discourse, for his thoughts are then said to dwell in the realms where no mere mortal may follow. When the Rebbe "says Torah," he stands on a plane of awe and reverence. The room becomes filled with superhuman ecstasy. Every word is remembered, not a syllable, not a gesture, not an unusual intonation or inflection of

the voice is permitted to be lost. When the Sabbath is over and the faithful ones return to their homes or lodgings, the "Torah" is carefully written out from memory.

Night has long since fallen, the time for the evening prayers is past. The congregation chants Psalm 23, after which the Rebbe sings three times Psalm 121, which is repeated by the Hassidim word for word. After the table benedictions have been discharged and the evening prayers recited, a large glass of wine is placed in the Rebbe's hand and, with great solemnity, he recites the blessings of *Habdalah,* which denotes the division between the Sabbath and the work-days. He then calls upon one of the especially prominent Hassidim to chant the hymn known as *Ha-Mabdil,* which is assisted by the congregation. The repetition of a Yiddish folk-prayer, composed by Rabbi Levi Yitzhok of Berditchev, rounds out the cycle of the Sabbath festivities.[21]

Melaveh Malkah[22] is, so to say, the extra kiss the Hassidim bestow upon Queen Sabbath at her departure. It is also called *Seudath David Ha-Melekh,* "the Feast of King David," as the honor of this celebration is ascribed to the psalmist king of Israel. It is celebrated late at night, usually midnight, and it is sometimes not until three or four o'clock in the morning before the guests depart. Although called by the stately name of *Seudah,* "banquet," no food is served by the Zaddik at this time; whatever refreshments appear on the table are made up of what the Hassidim themselves contribute. Fish, herring and brandy are the repasts of this occasion. But although it lacks the stateliness and solemnity of the Sabbath festivities, it is nevertheless carried out with great ceremony and genuine cheerfulness. No Torah is said by the Rebbe, instead the time is spent in merriment, consisting of singing and dancing.

During the high holidays of *Rosh ha-Shanah,* "New Year," and *Yom Kippur,* "the Day of Atonement," no Hassid may stay away from his Rebbe. It is the time

every Zaddik wants to have his Hassidim with him. On these days the unity of the Hassidic brotherhood reaches its highest point. It is the test that proves the Hassid's loyalty. No outside consideration of any kind, neither sickness, family nor business matters, will excuse the Hassid from making this annual pilgrimage to the court of his Zaddik. Even the lame and the halt will not be denied the opportunity. The Hassidim feel that they want to be under the Rebbe's direct influence during these great and solemn days.[23] When the Hassid is too poor to make the journey, household articles are pawned or sold, or assistance is given by his wealthier brethren to make the visit possible. In many cases the Hassid departs for the court of the Zaddik together with his wife and children, even though the latter may be too young to understand the full significance of the holy pilgrimage.

During these days, the Hassidim stand in special awe and fear of the Zaddik. A terrifying solemnity surrounds his whole court. There is none of the usual cheerfulness which one is accustomed to see there. Every Hassid lives as though he was in great suspense. The prayers, always warm and ecstatic, are these days filled with an extra measure of devotion. The Rebbe retires for longer hours than usual for seclusion and meditation. He is not as easily accessible to the eager and adoring multitudes who wait at his door, and when he does appear he is an awe-inspiring spectacle to behold. His burning face and eyes betray the gravity of the task which he feels during these days.[24]

In many cases the Zaddik himself appears as his people's intercessor during the holy days. He carries out in the synagogue all the functions that are connected with the services, viz., intones the prayers, reads the Torah, and blows the *Shofar,* or ram's horn. In such case the joy of the Hassidim is unbounded, for what better pleader of their cause could they dispatch than their own beloved Rebbe? The Zaddik may not be a trained Hazan,

nor possess an extraordinary musical voice, but he is an adept in the traditional chants, which he intones in a way and manner to arouse the ecstasy of the worshipers.

Although the holy days are carried out in their traditional austerity, there is greater confidence among the Hassidim about the outcome of the Day of Judgment than among the Mithnagdim. There is also less depression and anxiety. Even during these days, gloom and fear are strangers in the company of the Hassidim. While they are conscious of the gravity of the occasion and the responsibility it involves, they nevertheless do not grieve, for they trust in God and his holy Zaddikim. Their doctrine of cheerfulness upholds them. It is, therefore, not strange to see Hassidim dance round dances in which the Zaddik also joins, during the days that spell for the Mithnagdim awe and fear.[25]

VI

When, after the holy days, the Hassidim are about to return to their homes, each one to his business, trade or occupation, they appear again before the Rebbe, this time to secure his blessing. It is a kind of farewell visit, but is accompanied by much ceremony. Because of the large number of visitors, and the many requests that are made of him, each Hassid is required to make out a *Quittel,* or "prayer-note," containing his name and the name of his mother, according to the Zohar ritual,[26] and the nature of the need for which he is imploring the Rebbe's blessing. The usual formula of the Quittel is as follows: "With the Grace of God. Isaac, the son of Sarah, for his son Jacob, that he may recover from his illness." Or, "With the Grace of God. Samuel, the son of Hannah, for his daughter Leah, that she may secure a good match." Or, "With the Grace of God. Joseph, the son of Rachel, for his son Moses, that he may prosper in his study of the Torah and the fear of Heaven." Or, "With the Grace of God. Phinehas, the son of Aaron,

that he may prosper in his business." Women appear before the Rebbe and write Quittels as well as the men. The Quittels cover all the economic and spiritual needs of the Hassidim. There is not a domestic relationship, however intimate, that the Hassid hesitates to disclose to the Rebbe in the Quittel. Although the prayer-note passes through many hands before it reaches the Rebbe's desk, the Hassid feels that his secret will be guarded.

The prayer-note is accompanied by *Pidyon,* or "redemption money." The amount was usually eighteen, which is the numerical value of the Hebrew word *Hay,* meaning Life, although it may be eighteen cents or eighteen dollars, all according to the means of the Hassid. Neither the Rebbe nor his court dignitaries see the exact amount that is deposited on the Rebbe's table. The rich Hassidim deposit their substantial gifts; their poorer brethren give whatever they can afford.[27]

While the requests made in the Quittels may be many, the Rebbe's answer is always in the same phrasing, "The Holy One, blessed be He, will help you." The Hassidim who venture to press him for a more explicit and positive word are invariably disappointed, for the Rebbe will say no more. Yet such is the faith of the Hassidim that they depart from the presence of the Zaddik feeling that their prayer will be answered. The more indulgent Zaddikim sometimes add a few enigmatic words, which are afterwards studied with the greatest care, trying to discover in them an answer to their specific need.

It was the custom of some Hassidic saints, especially the celebrated Zaddik of Ruzhin, to present their Hassidim with silver coins, which when touched by the Rebbe's hand, were believed to possess special miraculous power, assuring their possessors of good fortune. The superstition spread and the number of applicants for the lucky coins increased. Sometimes the owner would sell the luck-bearing coins for a much higher amount than their actual value. In the course of time the coins assumed the impor-

tance of charms and amulets, which, in case of illness, were kept under the pillow as an aid to recovery. When the patient died, the coins would be laid in the grave of the deceased, in order to ward off the evil spirits and tormentors who disturb the sleep of the dead.[28]

It is thus that from the personal faith of the founder of Hassidism, an elaborate drama of religious rituals, rites, customs, institutions, organizations and superstitions developed, which first interpreted and afterwards debased the original meaning and intentions of the creator of the sect. The unity of the Jewish household for which he aimed, was dissipated by the creation of a great sectarian movement with a history and psychology of its own, in many instances different from the mass psychology of the Jewish group. The Jew needed a new spiritual environment; a faith was wanted upon which his soul could seize and in which he could find a refuge in his troubles and persecutions, personal and national. Hassidism provided the environment for which he was looking, and, therefore, though no longer resembling the original impulse that brought it into life, it nevertheless struggled on, cheering thousands with its light.

Chapter XV

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

The decadence of Hassidism came from within, not from without; it was not external pressure, but an inherent weakness existing in the movement itself that brought about its decline and fall. The attack of the rabbis would have proved powerless were it not that Hassidism contained from the very beginning the seeds of corruption. The movement, born amid such high promise and enthusiasm, quickly degenerated into a riotous and discredited sect, reflecting little honor upon its founder, and leaving behind it a trail of disappointment and bitterness. The truth of many another religious movement has been perverted by unprincipled demagogues and charlatans, but few religious sects hastened to their collapse with such speed as Hassidism. In less than a century after the death of its founder it was already tottering to its grave, much to the regret of its friends and the satisfaction of its foes.

Zaddikism is the viper that sucked the blood of its parent, Hassidism. No darker hour dawned upon the movement than when this ill-begotten child of Hassidism was born.[1] Ushered into life amid high hopes and pure aspirations, it ended in tragedy and disillusionment. In the hands of insincere and self-seeking practitioners, it became an instrument of oppression and corruption. By means of Zaddikism, a so-called spiritual aristocracy was ushered into existence, infinitely more harmful than the intellectual aristocracy of the rabbis which Hassidism came to dethrone. While Rabbinism threatened Judaism with ossification and spiritual sterility, Zaddikism brought

the religious life of the Jewish people to the very brink of collapse. An importance was attached to the cult of Zaddikism which made it occupy a central place in the ideology of the new faith, and which, in the end, obscured all its other teachings. Every other principle of Hassidism was relegated to the background to make room for this invention. The Zaddik became the symbol, the embodiment, the visible incarnation of the new movement. While only a few chosen intellects grasped the high religious and philosophical implications of Hassidism, there were thousands who were attracted by the dazzling and glamorous figure of the Zaddik. Hero worship is perhaps the oldest form of religion. From time immemorial the hearts of the people yearned for some visual object of veneration, whether it was a god, a king, a tribal chief, a priest or a saint. Over and against the cold and impersonal traditional rabbi, Hassidism introduced the figure of the Zaddik, to whom the masses responded with a homage and veneration seldom equalled in Jewish history. As happens in all cases when people cling to a person instead of an idea, it opened the path to demagoguery and charlatanry.

The principal offender was not Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob, nor exclusively the disciples and followers who came directly after him, for these were for the most part good and godly men who exerted a wholesome influence upon their generation, and their names remain a blessing to this day. It was not their hands that fashioned the idol which the deluded believers worshiped with such simple-hearted devotion. The torch they received from their master they handed down undimmed to posterity.

In addition to the gentle and saintly teachers of Hassidism already mentioned, there were others whose memory is enshrined in the lasting gratitude of the people for whom they lived and labored. There was, for instance, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, a kind and peace-loving sage who bore the burdens of the movement during its

most critical and stirring times, a Talmudist and mystic who loved the quiet and contemplative life; Nahum of Chernobyl, who combined intensity of feeling with a poetic imagination, living a life of penance and sacrifice among the poor and lowly people whom he taught and comforted. The "Grand Sire of Shpola" rejected the crown of both Rabbi and Zaddik to which he was entitled, preferring to preach and practice the pure and simple faith without sophistication, as he had received it from his master. He lived in life-long wandering, in order to take upon himself the Galuth-fate of his people. There was Abraham, son of the Great Preacher of Meseritz, called "Angel," because, in truth, he was more of a seraph than a human being. He lived in seclusion and isolation from the world, closeted in his study, where he actually burned himself up in the service of God; dying, or ascending to heaven, where he properly belonged, at the early age of thirty-six.[2]

It was not by these men that the faith and teachings of their Master were betrayed, for they were pure and holy men. They received generous gifts from their admirers which they distributed to the poor. Rabbi Israel, for instance, never went to sleep before giving away all the money he had to the poor, and when one night he found it impossible to close his eyes, he felt in his pockets and, discovering there a few coins, hastened to rid himself of them, after which he enjoyed peaceful slumber. All his eminent disciples practiced the habit of high thinking and holy living of their teacher. But soon came other men, those who inherited their fame and position, smaller and less exalted men who, dreaming dreams and cherishing ambitions of worldly power and dominion, degraded the teachings of their masters to a system of personal gain and ambition. The spirit of the Master of Medziboz became flesh and, as is inevitable, soon perished. Through the doctrine of Zaddikism, a multitude of dynasties, little kingdoms, principalities and spheres of influence arose,

each one jealously watching and protecting its interests with almost military discipline. Many of these principalities did well and succeeded in establishing for themselves rich houses and great followings, but their success in the end betrayed them, and they failed, and with them also failed the cause which they were supposed to uphold.

II

While Israel Baal Shem Tob cannot altogether escape responsibility for the creation of the Zaddik, it was in the hands of Rabbi Dob Baer of Meseritz that he became the prince and potentate of the Hassidic sect, something in nature of the great dignitaries of the Catholic Church. Almost entirely divested of human qualities, the Zaddik became a saint, a savior, a superman, a Buddha and God incarnate. He stands on the same level as Moses and the Prophets, and many of his admirers attributed to him qualities which are greater than theirs. The Zaddik not only speaks with the authority of the Torah, but he *is* the Torah, and may even at times change and abrogate it. The Deity reveals himself especially in his acts, and even his most trifling deeds are of the greatest and deepest significance. He rules by the possession of the greatest number of *Nizozoth,* or "sparks" of divine emanation, and God himself must often bend to his will and power. He is the root and soul of the world, the Oversoul, as Emerson would call him. He is the light, the torch, the illumination, the sun which brings light and warmth to the world. He is the spiritual artery through which flows the life-force of the universe, dispensing blessing and material prosperity. Great is his power, unlimited is his influence, his dominion extending over the visible and invisible world. All that man vaguely feels and hopes is revealed to him; to be perfectly happy, men must learn to love and serve him with child-like simplicity.

The Zaddik may not be an ordained rabbi, but rabbinical authority receives its sanction from him; he may

not be a scholar, and perhaps never sat at the feet of the masters of learning, but his power is greater than the authority which is derived from books. His rule is not by the intellect but by something greater than all the acquired wisdom—the prerogative of birth and divine appointment. A Zaddik is not made but born; no earthly power can either crown or dethrone him. He receives his scepter from God himself. Zaddikism is an inborn gift, a divine illumination of the soul which was placed in his cradle at the time of his birth. His soul, his mind, even his very body, are made of finer and nobler elements than those of the ordinary human beings. The Zaddik cannot be judged by commonplace standards. He may sometimes assume the form of the common flesh and even fall to its temptations, but this is only in his outward appearance, for his soul and the inward essence of his being remain pure and holy.

Ecclesiastical functionaries, without precedent in Jewish history, thus rose to power and influence. Upon the vague and uncertain concept of the Zaddik which one finds in the Bible and in the Talmud, Hassidism reared an institution of Zaddikism with rights and privileges closely resembling the Catholic priesthood. Few of the details of the Catholic ideal were omitted, not even the power to forgive sins. Whereas the authority of the Zaddik had been limited by the Holy Writ, making him subservient to a power greater than this, Hassidism set no limit to his powers and influence. Noah, called a Zaddik, proved unable to save the earth from destruction, but his Hassidic counterpart knows no such limitation. The Zaddikim of the Talmud acknowledge the superiority of God and the Torah, but the Zaddikim of Hassidism are supreme beings themselves, endowed with qualities that transcend divine authority. In short, with the rise of Hassidism a kind of Neo-Catholicism was introduced into Judaism which proved foreign and dangerous to the spirit of the ancient faith.

III

Unheard of as the innovation was, circumstances arose that conspired to legitimatize the claims of the Zaddik and bring him into great vogue and popularity. In olden times authority among the Jews was divided between the Priest and the Prophet. One was the head, the other the heart of the Jewish people. The Prophet was original, spontaneous, creative, thinking out new thoughts, writing new books and blazing new paths, while the Priest discovered the ways and means by which these truths might be perpetuated and preserved for the future. From the vision of the Prophet flashed the divine oracles, which, in the more practical idealism of the Priest, assumed the form of sacrifices and public worship, which, in many respects, saved these truths for thousands of years.

For many centuries after the destruction of the Temple, the rabbi assumed the function of both Priest and Prophet. He became the sole authority of the spiritual life of the Jewish people. He was not only the head but also the heart of the Jewish community; not only the creator but also the preserver of the cultural and spiritual values of his people. He not only taught the Law and wrote the books, but also directed and guided all the mundane affairs of the flock in his charge. His authority was supreme in the synagogue as in the marketplace, in the Beth Hamidrash as in the kitchen. He lived not only with, but also for the people. There were no barriers, no partitions separating him from those to whom he ministered. He was the symbol, the vital link connecting the past with the present. The people came to him not only for ritual questions, or to hear the Law expounded, but for everything that affected their immediate daily life. In all matters, in the most secret and sacred relations of their lives they turned to him.

But circumstances soon arose which changed the place and function of the rabbi in the life of the Jewish com-

munity. In the course of time, Rabbinism became a highly specialized function and the rabbi a one-sided man. Rabbinism drifted further and further away from its original purpose, which was to serve the daily needs of the community by the authority of the Torah, and restricted itself to one narrow sphere of influence, namely, the cultivation and preservation of Jewish learning. Talmudic learning, formerly widely diffused among the people, became the exclusive possession of a comparatively small circle of scholars who lived in seclusion from the very people whom they were intended to serve. This specialized function Rabbinism adequately discharged by the creation of a large number of scholars who were to preserve the ideals and traditions of Judaism for the future generations. But it did this at the expense of relaxing its grip on the realities of Jewish life. The rabbi became more and more a recluse, a scholar barricaded behind his books against the world, till his ideal was realized in the Gaon of Wilna who, although a great scholar, understood the world as little as the world understood him.

But, however satisfying the ideal of the Priesthood of Learning may have been to the scholars and students, it failed to satisfy the hunger of the plain and simple people, the thousands of Jews whom unkind fortune had banished from the large city communities and forced to spend their lives in the small towns and villages where they lived with their Christian fellow peasants in a semi-civilized environment. Their lives were prosaic and ordinary, full of toil and suffering with nothing to cheer or uplift them. They were also emotionally starved, with pent-up spiritual yearnings that were struggling for expression. They needed someone to love and be loved in return. The spiritual intimacy for which they were longing was denied them by the very men to whom they looked for religious guidance and comfort. In fact, they felt themselves chilled and awed in the presence of the High Priest of the Torah

and never dared to approach him. The rabbi held himself aloof and distant from the people whose very language he did not understand. He wanted the masses to come to him, but they were incapable of the ascent. The poor and uninstructed peasant Jews came to the city to hear the word of God expounded, but the rabbi seldom preached, and when he did occupy the pulpit once or twice a year, he addressed himself to the scholars, not to the simple-hearted folk. In this way the rabbis withdrew themselves from the world and lived in a world of their own, to be sure, a rich and beautiful world in many respects, one that was filled with ideas, books and scholars, but in which the common people had no part.

In many instances, the rabbis of the time we are describing were far from having been the models of piety and learning they were usually taken for. While there were among them great and saintly men, scholars of genuine worth and erudition, the majority were dull and mediocre, pitiful victims of that useless and unprofitable information which is mistaken for scholarship. "Any absurdity," writes Graetz, "however transparent, provided it was garnished with a few phrases from the Bible or the Talmud, was accepted as revealed Law." [3] This it was which gave Hassidism its strongest impetus and popularity and gained for it such dominance over the hearts and imagination of the masses. The old conflict between the Priest and the Prophet was revived with the same familiar cry, "The Prophet is a fool, the spiritual man mad." [4] If Rabbinism was vanquished, it was not because a greater and nobler ideal was substituted in its place, but because it lost its grasp of the realities of Jewish life.

IV

The Zaddik was the necessary and logical result of the spirit of fresh activity which Hassidism stirred up in the life of the Jewish people. He did not necessarily displace

the rabbi, but rather complemented his work. The antagonism which later developed between them was not due to the logic of their respective positions, but rather to misunderstanding. They were different not only in their training and outlook, but also in the character and manner of their service to the community. One ministered to the mind, the other to the heart; one spoke of books and scholars, the other of prayer and piety; one appealed to tradition, the other to the feelings and emotions; one kept himself aloof and secluded from the people, the other was accessible to them whenever they sought his company; one spoke the dialect of scholars, the other talked of horses, grains and harvests and sundry other things which happened to affect their daily lives. They lived in two different worlds, as different as were the people to whom they ministered. What wonder, then, that while among the learned and aristocratic classes the Zaddik was little known and still less honored, the poor and humble folk followed him with a new-born enthusiasm.

In many respects the Zaddik fulfilled the high function for which he had been created. He became the friend and companion of the people; he gave them not only his intimacy, but also that deep, spiritual understanding which pleased and flattered them. He was not only their religious guide, pastor and *Seelsorger,* but their friend and companion as well.[5] Thousands unbosomed themselves to him without shame or reservation as they would to no other man. They came to him as to an understanding friend or parent, with their joys and sorrows, their fears and anxieties. Whether ill or well, whether happy or afflicted, they turned to him for his counsel and blessing. He blessed the fruit of the land and the fruit of the womb; he told them when to buy and when to sell, when to start out on journeys and when to stay home. He settled their disputes, adjusted their differences, smoothed out their difficulties, and even arranged matches for their

children. In fine, their personal and family life held no intimacy that was not disclosed to him.[6]

In the spacious house of the Zaddik, or Rebbe, they satisfied their starved social instinct. They met Hassidim from all parts of the world; met them on terms of intimacy, which sharply contrasted with the high tone which prevailed in the traditional synagogue. The Zaddik's house was a meeting place for all kinds of people, presenting a piteous but picturesque spectacle of every variety of *Luftmenschen*—travelers, adventurers and common *schnorrers,* as well as high-class beggars, such as writers, authors, Palestine collectors, and other like impecunious gentlemen. To visit the courts of the Zaddik at least once every year was the duty and ambition of every Hassid, and the saints encouraged them in their desire. It was the wish of every Zaddik to have his Hassidim always about him, but especially during the high holidays. To carry out the behest of the Zaddik some came on foot while others sold or pawned their last belongings to secure transportation. They stayed in taverns, in cheap boarding places, or slept on the hard, wooden benches in the synagogues. Touching family tragedies were often enacted in order to carry out the behest of the saint. Business was neglected, families were deserted, and children grew up without remembering their fathers, as such visits were sometimes prolonged into weeks and months. Writes Solomon Maimon: "Pilgrimages were made to K. M. (Rabbi Dob Baer of Meseritz) and other holy places where the enlightened superiors of the sect abode. Young people forsook parents, wives and children, and went in troops to visit these superiors, to hear from their lips the new doctrine." [7]

They not only did not resent the Zaddik's rich and sumptuous life but felt rather pleased and flattered by it, for it agreeably contrasted with their own miserable and wretched existence. They decorated his person and palace with the same love and devotion as Catholics decorate

the shrines of their favorite saints. The stately appearance of the Zaddik, his impressive personality, the pomp and glamour of his life, cast a rainbow of romance over the flood of their suffering and misery. It created for them an illusion that made them forget the black anguish of their own lives. What cared they if they were denied this earth if the Zaddik showed them the splendor which is in store for them in the world to come!

V

Hassidism claims the credit for having emancipated the Jewish woman. In truth, not a few women played quite an important part in the Hassidic sect both as followers and as leaders.[8] While Rabbinism subordinated the place and position of woman to that of man and made her an inactive member of the Jewish community, Hassidism assigned to her a place and importance almost equal to that of her male partner. Rabbi Israel always spoke tenderly of his wife; when she died, he refused to remarry, remembering her loyalty and devotion in the days of their obscurity and poverty. Similar tenderness to their wives is to be found in the attitude of other Hassidic leaders. Udel, the daughter of Baal Shem, enjoyed a reputation and influence in Hassidism in her own right as did also her daughter, Feige, the mother of Nahman Bratzlav, whose gifts she helped to develop more than her husband, R. Simha, who was quite an ordinary and mediocre man. The "Maid of Ludomir" enjoyed a standing in the Hassidic sect almost equal to her counterpart in the Christian Church, having conducted herself like a Zaddik, with a synagogue and following all her own.[9] This may be the reason why women were among the first and most enthusiastic followers of the new sect. While woman was practically excluded from the presence of the traditional rabbi and never came in contact with him unless she went to consult him concerning the ritual affairs of her household, the Zaddik encouraged the

coming of women to him and made them welcome at his court.

Women often accompanied their husbands on their annual visits to the Zaddik and sometimes came alone. No door in his court that was open to men was closed to women. Like the male Hassid, she wrote the Quittel, or "prayer-note," paid the Pidyon, or "redemption money," and was ushered into the august presence of the saint with the same courtesy and ceremony as her husband.

What was it that brought the Jewish woman to the court of the Zaddik? She came because she considered herself a member of the Hassidic brotherhood. She took a personal pride and interest in the Hassidic Rebbe, which was unlike the feeling that the wife of the Mithnagid had toward her rabbi. While there was little encouragement for the latter to become attached to the rabbi, whose very language she hardly understood, the Rebbe created an atmosphere of tenderness and intimacy which was particularly attractive to the feminine members of his flock. Sensing his human understanding and sympathy, they unburdened themselves to him of whatever secret shame or sorrow pressed on their hearts. They poured into his ear tales of disappointment and frustrations that they would not breathe to any other human being.

But there were also practical reasons which made women seek the courts of the Zaddik. Women have problems of their own, those of domestic relations, the upbringing of children and the problem of over-ripe daughters. There were also the barren women who felt themselves cast out of God. Children, according to the orthodox faith, being material for the peaceful repose of the soul after death, the childless wife was far from happy. Children being the privilege of the married man, husbands are permitted by Jewish law to divorce their wives after ten years of fruitless marriage. In the days when scientific medicine was not quite universal, recourse was

taken to pious remedies to effect the birth of offspring, in which function the Zaddik figured as an expert. Quite a number of such holy men built up a reputation among their female parishioners because of their alleged successful practice among barren women. That their success was not always secured without malpractice, according to humorous critics, did not discourage the unfortunate women who were yearning for children from resorting to these "miracle-workers." But whatever the reason, the Jewish woman, who for centuries remained a forgotten and neglected member of the Jewish community, her sphere of usefulness limited by the sages of the Talmud to the spindle,[10] suddenly found herself an active, contributing member of the new faith. Her new position flattered her and she amply repaid with her devotion the privilege accorded her.

VI

The Zaddik did not always live on the high plane of pure idealism where popular fancy enthroned him. He sometimes yielded to the temptations of the flesh and made a laughing-stock of himself and his high calling. There were no doubt Zaddikim who were pure and holy men and led exemplary lives. They were conscious of their high obligations and discharged them with the utmost care and love. They were genuine friends of the poor and distributed whatever they had with a generous hand and heart. Unfortunately, however, they were the exceptions, for soon the time came when cunning took the place of wisdom and worldliness was installed in the palace of the saints. A race of so-called Zaddikim came upon the scene who were greedy and self-seeking worldlings and who, instead of perpetuating the faith and ideals of Hassidism for which they had been created, lowered and degraded them, sowing the seeds of decay and corruption which brought their high calling to ill repute among friends and foes alike. It was but natural that it

should be so, for no such power and authority had ever been placed in the hands of living men. It would have taken seraphim and cherubim to exercise these powers without abuse, and the Zaddikim, despite their supernatural pretensions, were but frail human beings. If the fall of Zaddikism was inevitable, no one could have dreamed that it would come down with such a crash and in so short a time; for hardly was it established when it was already speeding to its doom and destruction.

It is no exaggeration to say that a good deal of the poverty, ignorance and superstition of the Jews in Poland is directly attributable to the cult of Zaddikism. It spread a blight over large sections of the Jews in Eastern Europe from which they have not yet entirely recovered. Intended to save and serve the Jews, it became their most tyrannical oppressor, its tyranny becoming all the more unendurable because it was exercised in the name of God and religion. With the ascendancy of Zaddikism, a so-called religious hierarchy came into existence which was without a parallel in Jewish history. Not satisfied with spiritual authority, the Zaddikim dreamed of temporal power besides. To give themselves a touch of royal dignity, they had themselves built palaces and courts that outshone in pomp and splendor the establishments of the Polish noblemen. Their courts were often removed from the Jewish sections of the town after the fashion of the baronial castles of the Middle Ages. Since the greatness of a Zaddik depended not so much on his wisdom, learning or piety, as on the number of his followers and the sumptuousness of his court, everything was done by his faithful followers to surround him with the splendor and glory of an Eastern potentate. Jewish tradition pictures the Messiah as a poor and humble man who will come riding on a donkey, but these "godly" Zaddikim rode in magnificent equipages drawn by glistening horses, with footmen in full regalia.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob died and bequeathed his

throne to a stranger. A man not born of his flesh inherited the scepter from Rabbi Dob Baer. The same was true of many other of the early masters of the Hassidic faith. The Zaddikim, however, who followed them established dynasties and created successions much after the style and fashion of secular rulers. Unlike those among whom the succession descends to the first-born, each of the male offspring of a Zaddik is considered a saint from his mother's womb, "sanctified by the holy thoughts of his father at the time of his conception." [11] The race of Zaddikim thus increased and multiplied according to the number of their male children, each one teaching the Law, dispensing blessings, distributing favors, trafficking in prayer-notes and collecting money from the lame, the halt, the sick, the crippled, and barren women.

Democracy was the very essence of the Hassidic faith. As Israel Baal Shem Tob conceived it, Hassidism was a religion for the rich and poor, for the great and simple alike, and the Zaddik was to symbolize this ideal in his own life and conduct. At the Rebbe's table there were to be no reserved seats, no preference or favoritism of any kind. The early Zaddikim lived up to this ideal; but when costly courts and expensive living became the fashion, it was quickly realized that these things could not be maintained on piety alone. Methods had therefore to be devised to secure a steady flow of gold into the Zaddik's spacious coffers.

While the Zaddik was the master of his household, he was not allowed to manage the affairs of his own court. He was the ecclesiastical head, the grand seigneur, the God-incarnate who dwells in spheres too high and lofty for the things of this earth. Like the Supreme Pontiff, he was not permitted to cheapen himself by appearing too often among the jostling crowds at his doors. The master of the Zaddik's household was the *Gabbai,* or "Manager," often a cunning and crafty individual who managed to rise to power and influence by flattering or bullying his

superior till he became the major-domo of his court. His authority was often even greater than that of his master, for he knew all the intimacies of his house; all the petty feuds and quarrels of his family; their extravagant ambitions and vulgar pretensions. He knew the crowds that beleaguered the Zaddik's doors. He knew the rich from the poor, the high-class beggars from the common paupers. He knew whom to flatter and whom to bully; whom to admit and whom to keep out; whom to place at the head of the table and whom at the end. He trafficked, bargained and traded with the deluded fanatics as though they were buying horses and cows and not blessings. It was thus but natural that visitors who came in furs and silks received greater courtesy and attention than those who came on foot and in rags.

While the poor and the sick brought to the Zaddik their humble petitions, there were among his visitors also rich and influential men. They came for his advice and blessing on their new business ventures. Not infrequently it was found that the Zaddik entered into partnership with them; contributing, however, no money, but only his blessing, which was considered of greater value than any financial contribution. The Zaddik was in many instances far from an impractical and unworldly saint. The large number of people he met, the business and trade conditions he learned from them gave him a mastery over business affairs which made his opinion in such matters highly valuable. It is, therefore, not surprising that among his closest intimates were found men of great business enterprises who came to consult him not only on the state of their souls but on the more practical state of their secular affairs. The Zaddik's house often resembled a trade center more than a religious shrine, and business talk was more common than prayers. Partnerships were formed and dissolved, disputes were heard and settled. Large holdings changed hands and commercial enterprises were launched and liquidated under his direct guidance and

supervision. In all these matters the Zaddik acted as judge, arbitrator and business expert. Whatever his part, his word was respected and his decision solemnly carried out.[12]

VII

The story of Zaddikism would not be complete without touching upon the economic and political influence of the "holy" men of the Hassidic sect. Although they did not engage in business or commerce, the presence of a Zaddik in a territory was of no little economic advantage to it. While they did not directly affiliate themselves with any political group or party, the Zaddikim nevertheless wielded no small political influence. The cult of Zaddikism may have contributed to the impoverishment of the Jews, but it stimulated the economic life of Poland, at least those parts of the country where the Hassidic saints happened to reside. While they enslaved their followers, they helped to redeem many an impecunious Polish nobleman from financial difficulties.

Polish landowners were known to have been considerate to the Hassidic princes of the synagogue. Their regard for them was not because of their excessive love for the Jews, but because of the economic wealth and prosperity which the Zaddikim were expected to bring to their estates. As happened during the Middle Ages when kings and bishops fought for the possession of Jews because of the material advantages they were supposed to bring with them, so it was also in Poland when Zaddikism was in flower.

Polish landlords made every effort to induce popular Zaddikim to come and take up residence within their borders. The presence of a well-known Zaddik in a Polish principality was worth to it as much as the bones of a favorite saint for the business he stimulated. The many visitors a Zaddik attracted to his court and the lavish hand with which they spent their money made him a wel-

come guest in any country he chose to take up residence. It is thus that the Poles, who hated the Jews, affected an attitude of respect and deference to the Hassidic leaders, tolerating the grand airs they were giving themselves, even encouraging their illusion of power.

Even politically, the Zaddik was far from having been as helpless as one might imagine. Although his kingdom was not of this earth, he at the same time did not neglect the advantages which his position and influence conferred upon him. Due to his standing with his flock, he was in a position to surround himself with political power which was of no little importance. In the Austrian empire where the Jew had the right to vote, the ballot was a powerful instrument which the Zaddik knew how to wield to his advantage. By its means he was able to wring from the political powers of his country concessions which otherwise would be hard to secure.

The Zaddik could not present himself as a candidate for election to the Austrian Parliament, but he could sway the election of any other candidate whom he chose to support. He could not use his constitutional right of suffrage himself, but he could further the political ambitions of any other aspirant to office. His authority over the Hassidim was complete, and they executed his bidding without question or hesitation. It is thus that the political fortunes of many a Polish or German candidate for office were made or marred by the influence of the Zaddik. It is self-evident that such political favors were not gratuitously bestowed but were the result of negotiations and bargains with advantages to both sides.

The Jews, however, had little to gain from the growing political power of the Zaddikim which, indeed, was often used against their interests. Armed with such influence the Zaddikim were in a position to thwart whatever attempts were being made for their educational advancement. Zaddikism, knowing no greater enemy than education, was naturally interested in thwarting or im-

peding its spread and progress. Thus, when the compulsory education of the children and other such cultural advantages were entertained by the Austrian government, the Hassidic shepherds of their flocks stamped the measures as "ungodly" and defeated the proposed legislation.

Particularly notorious for his political wire-pulling was Rabbi Joshua Rokeah, the famous Zaddik of Belz. He was the first of the Zaddikim to realize the political opportunities of his exalted office and use it for the furtherance of the "ideals" he represented. German and Polish candidates for political honors sued for his favor and support, which he granted to the stultification of the cultural life of the people whom he dominated. When the more progressive elements of the Jews of Cracow laid plans for a rabbinical school, where spiritual leaders would be trained in accordance with modern needs and methods, he used his influence in Vienna to squelch the project, realizing the danger such measure would accrue to his position and power. The threatened "calamity" was averted and the renown of his "holiness" was all the greater among his followers.[12a]

Thus, the influence of Zaddikism was spreading. The princes of the synagogues became political potentates as well. Nothing that was calculated to entrench them in power and perpetuate their dynastic glory was neglected by the Hassidic saints. Little, however, did they realize that they were but trying to stop with their finger a widening gap. The little temporary triumphs they had won were all the more tragic in their effect, for they helped to hasten their ultimate decline and fall.

VIII

Perhaps the most injurious effect of Zaddikism was the rift it helped to bring about in the Jewish camp, rousing passions and inspiring animosities that were cruel and bitter in their results and consequences. A great deal of

the poverty and wretchedness of the Jews in Poland, their divisiveness and lack of cohesion, was due to the petty jealousies created by the quarrelling Hassidic dynasties. Polish Jews were divided among themselves, not on cultural or political questions, but on their allegiance to the Zaddik. The followers of one Hassidic saint were bitterly opposed to the devotees of another Zaddik, and the resulting conflicts were often long and destructive. Hassidism, meant to unite the Jews, divided them, and the peace and harmony it intended to bring about, ended in strife and acrimony.[18]

Hassidism succeeded in inspiring its followers with a sense of group loyalty, but it also engendered a feeling of hostility and jealousy among the members of the rival dynastic families. Whatever may have been their divine claims and pretensions, the Zaddikim were subject to the ordinary temptations of the flesh. The kingdoms they received from their forebears they desired to bequeath to their descendants undiminished, if not enlarged and enriched by their own acquisitions. Every Zaddik considered himself the exclusive potentate of the territory over which he ruled, and the invasion of his sphere of influence filled the air with belligerent clamor. In such dynastic quarrels, families, towns and whole communities frequently became involved; sentiment sometimes running to so high a pitch that the authority of the Christian courts had to be invoked to settle the disputes of the Hassidic saints. In such gang warfare violence and acts of terrorism were not unknown. Family relationships were dissolved; matches were broken off; parents recalled their children, compelling them to divorce their life partners, and Jewish communities anathematized each other in grand and solemn style. Secret betrayals were made to the government, resulting in sudden raids, arrests, banishments and long-term sentences. Some of these quarrels have become notorious for the shame and reproach which they brought to the Jews. An entire literature which

makes amazing and painful reading has grown up on the subject.

The most distressing feature of these disputes was that they were born neither of sincerity nor conviction. They were not theological wranglings concerning points of belief or dogma. Questions of creed had no part in these sectarian strifes. No holy crusade inflamed their passions. They were inspired neither by God nor the Torah. Religious squabbles may be condoned when motivated by convictions deep and genuine; but the feuds that set large sections of Jewry against each other had no such excuse. They were cheap and paltry, vulgar and material; greed and jealousy and the desire to protect the vested rights of the reigning families were the parents of almost all of this "pious" wrangling. Thus there was a rivalry between the Zaddikim of Chernobyl and their colleagues of Sadagora; between the followers of Nahman Bratzlav and the adherents of all other Hassidic groups; between the holy men of Russia and their votaries in Poland; between the faithful in Warsaw and their devotees in Galicia. Attempts that were made to correct this evil and bring about peace and harmony between the various Hassidic groups proved futile because of the individual causes which operated in each case and the personal interests involved.

Thus it was that the teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tob were degraded and his flag lowered. While many Zaddikim rose to power and material success, Hassidism became weak and impotent. Great houses and influential dynasties sprang up almost overnight, only to make the crash of their fall all the more painful. While the Zaddikim were waxing fat on the sweat and toil of their deluded followers, little spiritual advance was made by the doctrine they were intended to further and uphold. The teachings of Rabbi Israel and his disciples soon became sterile and rigid, infinitely less creative and inspiring than the Rabbinism they were to supplant. While a con-

siderable Hassidic literature developed, there is little that is new or original, the same texts and illustrations being repeated again and again with wearisome monotony. It is a sad and uninspiring spectacle to behold a movement that aimed so high and aspired so nobly, and which to thousands seemed like an oasis in a weary and desolate wilderness, end in such dire disaster.

IX

External circumstances linked to internal corruption combined to dethrone Zaddikism from its seat of power and influence. The World War has dealt Zaddikism a blow from which it may never recover. The bloody conflict of nations has affected all classes of Jewry, but its impact on Hassidism has been devastating. Great houses, powerful dynasties have been thrown to the ground never to rise again. Hassidic potentates who ruled over vast domains with thousands as their followers, suddenly found themselves alone, impoverished and deserted. Their power was gone, their territories ruled by alien nations, and their worshipers scattered far and wide. With their income gone, the Zaddikim were compelled to live the hard life of poverty and humiliation.

Together with their followers, many of the Hassidic saints went into exile. They were broken and ruined men. Their courage left them, the old Hassidic *Bitahon,* "confidence," failed them. Their trust in God had not saved them, much less their supporters and admirers. Days of terrible agony and suffering followed. Their erstwhile followers, instead of clinging to their demigods all the more tenderly, left and deserted them. A suffering Messiah is not half as attractive as a Messiah clad in the armor of victory.

The children and grandchildren of the Hassidim, who slept with the Zaddikim on the same hard, wooden benches of the railroad depots or shared with them the same hard crust of the bread of affliction, no longer felt

the same awe of their presence as did their fathers and grandfathers. They saw before them not great and victorious saints, able to storm heaven with their prayers, but helpless and defeated old men. Having nothing themselves, they had little to give to those who implored them for assistance. The starved multitudes asked the Zaddikim for bread, but all they could give were prayers.

As a consequence of the war, the Jewish frontier moved west. Large numbers of Jews left the scenes of their misery for the green pastures of the new world. But in trying to save themselves they seldom thought of the saints they had left behind. Their acquaintance with suffering had broken an illusion which was never again to cheer and comfort them. In some instances, the Zaddikim followed the trail of their Hassidim and established themselves in the new world; but it was the ghost of Hassidism that moved westward, not its inner spirit. America proved ill prepared to perpetuate a tradition which was conceived and born in other times and climes. Thus, although the externals of Zaddikism are being carried out in America, its spirit is gone beyond recall. The current of life flows too swiftly for the American Jews to be able to spare the time for the mystical transports of Hassidism as represented by the Zaddikim.

In olden times, the Rebbe's court was the only place where the Hassidim sought and found their diversions, but to-day the radio, the theater and the cinema provide a more exciting sensation than any Zaddik can offer. Pitiful relics of a bygone day are, therefore, those Hassidic saints who strut the overcrowded ghettos of the large Jewish communities in America. They represent empty shells, the contents of which have been blown away by the wind. They still dress in the same old bizarre way—long, shiny caftans, white stockings and fur-trimmed hats—but their heart is no longer with them. They know that they are waging a losing fight. Their kingdom is lost beyond recall.

X

While, however, the externals of Hassidism, with Zaddikism as its foundation, is tottering, its spirit, the faith and hope that brought it into life, seem to be reviving again. The very suffering the Jews have endured has had the effect of restoring life to the seemingly dead body. The very sons and grandsons of the Hassidim who had deserted their sires' religion, are returning to the faith their ancestors worshiped. Thus writes a modern author of the younger generation of the great Jewries of Europe he visited: "In many quarters of Polish Jewry a new Chasidism has arisen, a glamorous recovery of the theosophy and mysticism of the old in a language suited to the times. It has fired yesterday's liturgy with today's meaning, and recovered the precious inward self-sufficient sanction of life and living. In its turn it is a relaxation—now from the intellectual rigors of socialism, its practical ardors and passionate discipline. A weary and sorrowing generation seeks joy again and finds—futility. Best, then, to give up the modern struggle, the mentation, the machinery and their martyrdom. Back to the simple faith and the simple way. Back to mysticism and magic—real mysticism and symbolic magic. For he who has realized God has everything he needs." [14]

So it is in many parts of Europe and America. Weary of their search for the peace which the world has failed to give them, the thinking Jewish youth of to-day have become mystical and find in Hassidism the goal of their quest. It is, of course, a greatly changed and purified Hassidism, in which Zaddikism plays no part, retaining the spirit while rejecting the shell of the old faith. A spiritual yearning for God and oneness with His people, Israel, is making itself felt among thousands of younger men and women in America and the world over. It is this Neo-Hassidism and the influence it is exerting over many hearts that is one of the most amazing revelations

of present-day Jewry. For two hundred years Hassidism has been ignored by its opponents and decried as a superstition by the more enlightened Jews, but of late it is being re-evaluated, and the opinion seems to be general that, when properly used and directed, there may be in it a potential creative force which may yet pave the way for a new Jewish development. Already has it created a new art and a new literature; already has it inspired a drama like "The Dybbuk," and songs, melodies and dances which are loved and admired all over the world; already has it produced saints and mystics, thinkers and poets like Israel Baal Shem Tob, Levi Yitzhok Berditchev, Sheneir Zalman Ladi and Nahman Bratzlav. Who can tell what other horizons of thought and influence may yet open up for the Jews once they have learned to use this untapped source of spiritual strength and wisdom!

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

CHAPTER I

THE literature on the subject of the first and second chapters is so vast that no man can hope to traverse more than its main roads. On the subject of the Kabbalah alone whole libraries have been written. Fortunately, every first-class history of the Jews provides a summary that will be of material assistance to the reader.

Graetz' "History of the Jews" is always instructive, except on the subject of the Kabbalah, where, because of his rationalistic attitude, his views are one-sided. The writer has made use of his work, as every man must who writes on any Jewish subject. "A History of the Jewish People," by Drs. Margolis and Marx, has been prepared with great care, and the reader will find it accurate on every point. "History and Destiny of the Jews" by Josef Kastein, is an excellent volume, making good reading. Lewis Browne has dramatized Jewish history in "Stranger than Fiction" which the busy reader will peruse with pleasure.

On the Kabbalah no man has done better work than Gerhard Scholem, whose article, "Kabbala," in the Encyclopedia Judaica, together with Dr. Louis Ginzberg's "Cabala" in the Jewish Encyclopedia, may be accepted as authoritative statements on the subject. Adolf Franck and Christian Ginsburg have written under the title, "The Kabbalah." The general reader will find an illuminating account of the Zohar and the Kabbalah in "The Holy Kabbalah" by A. E. Waite. The Essenes and the "Ancient Hassidim" have been treated by Dr. Kaufman Kohler in "The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church," although his views must be followed with considerable reservation. For the first time the Zohar has been translated into English by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, which, although containing no notes, is provided with an excellent introduction by J. Abelson.

It is to be regretted that the subject of mysticism has proven more intriguing to Christian writers than to Jews. Beside the works of

Jones, Inge, Underhill and Leuba, to mention but a few, the Jewish contribution is negligible. An encouraging beginning, however, has been made by J. Abelson in "Jewish Mysticism" and "The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature," and by S. A. Horodezky in his *Ha-Mistorin B'Yisroel,* and the chapters in *Ha-Hassiduth V'Hassidim.* For shorter accounts of the subject the reader is referred to "Jewish Mysticism" and "Jewish Mystics" by Dr. J. H. Hertz; "Jewish Mystics" by S. A. Hirsch; *Le Hassidisme* by A. Z. Aescoly-Weintraub; "Jewish Mysticism" by H. Sperling, in "Aspects of the Jewish Genius"; "A Mystical Approach to Judaism," by M. Grossman, Menorah Journal, February, 1929, and the chapters devoted to the subject in "History of Jewish Literature," by Dr. Meyer Waxman.

[1] Maimonides explains in the "Guide for the Perplexed" that *Ma'aseh Bereshith* corresponds to physical and *Ma'aseh Merkabah* to metaphysical science. They have been termed otherwise as History of Creation and History of the Divine Throne. Comp. Zunz, *Gottesdienstliche Vortrage,* Chapter IX; J. Abelson, "Jewish Mysticism" and "The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature"; Martin Buber, *Vom Geiste Des Judentums,* pp. 96-117.

[2] Daniel, 7, 6.

[3] Comp. Kohler, "The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church." For an analysis of the term *Hassid,* comp. S. Schechter, "Studies in Judaism," (second series); Adolf Buchler, "Types of Jewish Palestinian Piety," pp. 7-67; also Sotah 21b, where the term *Hassid Sotah,* "foolish Hassid" is used to designate one who, because of his over-punctiliousness in the observance of the Law, is endangering the life of a human being.

[4] Ber. 5, 1; Tos. Ber. 3, 20.

[5] Kohler, ibid., Chapter IX.

[6] Ben Sira 3, 20.

[7] Comp. Tailor, "Ethics of the Fathers," Chapter V, notes.

[8] In his juvenile work, "The Virtuous Being Free," Philo speaks of the Essenes as having numbered more than 4,000, while in "The Apology for the Jews," he mentions myriads of the disciples of Moses who lived in the Essene community. Pliny (Hist. Nat. V, 17) tells of their ranks being constantly swelled by the thousands of newcomers who resorted to them because of their disappointment with and contempt for the world.

[9] Graetz, "History of the Jews," Vol. II, Chapter VIII. Norman Bentwich, "Philo-Judaeus," pp. 46 ff.; Margolis-Marx, "History of the Jewish People," p. 186.

[10] Meyer Waxman, "History of Jewish Literature," Vol. I, p. 112; Bentwich, ibid., pp. 73, 156, 195, 243 ff.

[11] Margolis-Marx, ibid., pp. 186-187.

[12] Bentwich, ibid., p. 233.

[12a] Name of two works which have been preserved from the Palestinian and Babylonian schools during the period extending from the third to the

fifth century C.E. One of the compilations is called "Palestinian Talmud," and the other, "Babylonian Talmud," the latter being about three times as large as the former. The Talmud became an authoritative source for Judaism, second only to the *Torah* (Old Testament), and in some cases even rivalling it in importance. It is considered as the embodiment of all the ancient traditions as revealed on Sinai. All subsequent codifications of Jewish law are binding only as they are summaries of the Talmud. After its completion, the chief task of Jewish learning was its interpretation. Wherever Jewish centres were established, their chief interest revolved around the Talmud.

[12b] Derived from the Hebrew verb *shanah,* "to repeat," or "to learn." Mishnah is used to designate the law which was transmitted orally. The term is particularly used to describe the collection of laws and traditions edited by Rabbi Judah the Saint (135-220). It is the digest of Jewish ritual and jurisprudence and forms the text upon which the Talmud mostly comments. The Mishnah is divided into six main parts, or orders, known in abbreviation as Shass.

[12c] An Aramaic word, meaning "study." The term is applied to the body of traditions that grew up as commentary and supplement to the Mishnah. It became the subject of study in the schools of Palestine and Babylon. The chief topic of discussion in the Gemarah is law, although there is also a good deal of non-legal matter in it.

[13] Hag. 2, 1.

[14] Hag. 13a.

[15] Ibid., 14b.

[16] Suk. 28a.

[17] Hag. 14b.

[18] Lev. R. XVI. In Can. R. the same is told in a somewhat different version of Rabbi Eleazer ben Arakh.

[19] Suk., ibid.

[20] Meg. 3a.

[21] Haninah ben Dosa, scholar and miracle-worker of the first century. He gained great popularity on account of his saintliness and thaumaturgic powers. Was famous for the influence of his prayers (Ber. 34b), especially to produce rain (Ta'anith 24b). When, one Sabbath eve, his daughter filled the lamp with vinegar instead of oil, the lamp burned all day out of respect for his piety (ibid. 25a). At his death it was said, "wonder workers ceased to exist" (Sotah 9, 15).

Phineas ben Yair lived during the second half of the second century. Many stories are told of him in the Talmud in illustration of his scrupulous honesty. He laid special stress upon the prescriptions relating to the tithes, which even his mule observed (G.R. XVI). On his way to ransom prisoners, he crossed the River Gina on dry ground (Jer. Demai. 1, 13; Hul. 7a).

Joshua ben Levi, a Palestinian scholar of the first half of the third century. Gained his reputation for his devotion to public welfare. Popular legend made a hero of him. He is often made the companion of Prophet Elijah in his wanderings on earth. He likewise had dealings with the Angel of Death (Ber. 51a). Was permitted to visit paradise while he was yet alive (Derekh Erez Zutta, Chapter I).

Honi (Onias) the Circle-Drawer was famous as a teacher and miracle worker during the first century B.C. Became known for his rain-producing powers (Ta'anith 23a). It is related of him, that when he entered the hall of the Temple, the place became brightly illuminated. He met his death because of his refusal to pray for victory in a war between the two Hasmonean brothers, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus (Josephus, Ant. XIV, 2, 1; Jewish Encyc., "Hyrcanus"). According to Talmudic sources, however, he went to sleep at the time of the destruction of the first Temple and did not awake until after the rebuilding of the second Temple.

[22] There is nothing mystifying about the term "Kabbalah" to suggest the doctrine that goes by its name. Stated briefly, it is the hidden thought of Israel upon the doctrine of the Jewish religion. Whatever is not contained in the Bible but was taught by the rabbis as an oral tradition, goes by the name of Kabbalah. Coming from the root of a Hebrew word which means "to receive," Kabbalah may be translated as "reception."

While, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the term "Kabbalah" became so popular as to crowd out all the other designations by which the esoteric science was described, this branch of knowledge was known also by many other names. Thus, the Talmud speaks of it as *Sithre* or *Raze Torah,* "Secrets of the Torah"; *Maasseh Bereshith* and *Maaseh Merkabah,* and those who occupied themselves with it, as *Yorde Merkabah,* or "Riders of the Chariot." In Gaonic times, the term *Baale Sod,* "Masters of the Secret Doctrine," was employed; also, *Anshe Emunah,* "Men of Faith." Older than the term "Kabbalah," is the expression *Hakhmah Peninith,* "Inward Wisdom." Mystics went by the name of *Maskilim,* referring to Dan. 12, 10, or *Dorshe Reshumoth,* "Searchers of the Scriptures." In many books, Kabbalists are also spoken of as *Baale Abodah,* or "Masters of the True Worship."

[23] So called, because of the *Gaonim,* "Excellencies," a title applied to the heads of the Talmudic academies in Sura and Pumpaditha, flourished in Babylon during the sixth century, although it continued for a long time after the destruction of these academies. In later times, the term *Gaon* was seldom used. The last Talmudic authority to bear this title, was Rabbi Elijah, Gaon of Wilna.

[24] Some of the mystical works of this period are *Aleph Beth* of *Rabbi Akiba,* on the letters of the alphabet; *Hekhaloth* "Mansions," on the heavenly halls, attributed to Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha; *Metatron-Enoch,* also ascribed to Rabbi Ishmael, describing his ascent to heaven and the angel Metatron who acted as his guide; *Shiur Komah,* "The Measure of Heights," a highly anthropomorphic description of the limbs of the God-head, likewise accredited to Rabbi Ishmael. For full treatment of the subject, comp. Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. III, pp. 461 ff.; Meyer Waxman, ibid., pp. 376-397. For an exposition of *Sefer Yezirah,* comp. Judah Halevi, Kuzari, IV, 25.

[25] For the rise of the Kabbalah in Spain, comp. Graetz, ibid., Vol. III, pp. 546 ff.; Josef Kastein, ibid., pp. 272 ff.

[26] The literature on the Zohar is almost staggering, but, for convenient reference, consult Adolf Franck and Christian Ginsburg, both writing under the title "The Kabbalah"; J. Abelson, "Jewish Mysticism," pp. 117-135; A. E. Waite, "The Holy Kabbalah"; Graetz, ibid., Vol. IV, pp.

11-24; article "Zohar" in the Jewish Encyclopedia, and numerous studies on the subject by Gerhard Scholem.

[27] Graetz, ibid., Vol. IV, p. 21.

[28] Zohar, Ed. Wilna, III, 149b.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Comp. Abelson, ibid.; also his chapter, "The Soul."

[31] Zohar, ibid., 245b.

[32] On the spread of the Zohar, comp. Graetz, Vol. IV, pp. 21-24.

[33] Comp. Joseph Jacobs, "Jewish Contribution to Civilization," pp. 176-177; A. E. Waite, ibid., pp. 437-513.

[34] Eliezer of Worms, a pupil of Rabbi Judah the Saint, stated that a Babylonian scholar, Aaron ben Samuel by name, brought the mystic doctrine from Babylon to Italy about the middle of the ninth century, whence it spread to Germany. Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 463.

On the spread of the Kabbalah in Germany, comp. A. Epstein, *Ha-Hoker,* II; Schechter, "Studies in Judaism" (second series), "Jewish Saints in Medieval Germany," pp. 38-48.

[35] As the term is used in the Talmud (Pes. 86b), writes Dr. Ginzberg in a note to this book, it serves to describe a man little distinguished for either learning or saintliness. R. Hunah, who applied the term to himself, is not the famous head of the academy of Sura, but another man, about four hundred years later, who served in the capacity of exilarch.

[36] *Sefer Hassidim,* ed. R. Margoliss, Lemberg, p. 12.

[37] For a graphic account of Reubeni, comp. Graetz, ibid., pp. 491 ff.; Monatschrift, 1931, March-April, pp. 127 ff.

[38] Graetz., ibid., pp. 496 ff.; Schechter, "Studies in Judaism" (second series), pp. 222-227.

CHAPTER II

For more intensive study of the material contained in this chapter, the reader is referred, in addition to the works already mentioned, to S. Dubnow's "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," and *Die Sociale Verhältinisse in XVIII Jahrhundert* in his *Geschichte des Chassidismus.* The most illuminating account of Safed was written by Dr. S. Schechter in "Studies in Judaism" (second series). For all his importance, there is comparatively little written on Isaac Luria, except Dr. Schechter in his chapter on Safed, Graetz, the Jewish Encyclopedia, and an article in *Hazofeh* (XI, 4, pp. 313-318). Luria left no books and all that we have of him is one short statement quoted by his disciple and apostle, Hayim Vital.

Despite his glamorous career, there is little that is accessible to the general reader about Sabbatai Zebi, except a fictitious sketch by Israel Zangwill in "The Dreamers of the Ghetto," and "The Mes-

siah of Ismir" by Josef Kastein. Graetz, however, treats the subject adequately, as does the Jewish Encyclopedia, under the title, "Shabbthai Zebi." Prof. M. Balaban made Jacob Frank the subject of a study in the Hebrew periodical *He-Atid* (V, pp. 132-150), and a separate publication, *L'Toldoth Ha-Tenuah Ha-Frankith* (Tel Aviv, 1934).

The Haskalah movement has been treated variously, from extreme enthusiasm to moderate scorn. To mention but a few books on the subject, the reader will do well to consult "The Haskalah Movement," by Jacob Raisin; "The Renaissance of Hebrew Literature," by Nahum Slouschz; "Hebrew Reborn," by Shalom Spiegel, and "The Evolution of Modern Hebrew Literature" by A. S. Waldstein.

[1] Graetz, "History of the Jews," Vol. IV, p. 400.

[2] Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), the youngest of the group, was a pupil of Karo in Talmud and of Alkabez, whose brother-in-law he became, in the Kabbalah. His principal work is *Pardes Rimonim,* "A Garden of Pomegranates," the pomegranate, with its innumerable seeds, being a favorite object of symbolism. With the possible exception of Luria, he was the greatest Kabbalist of his day.

Solomon Alkabez is the composer of the poem, "Come my beloved and let us welcome the Bride," for the reception of the Sabbath, which is still sung in the synagogues.

Karo (1488-1575) was the author of the *Shulhan Arukh,* "The Prepared Table," a work that eclipsed the codes of remoter times upon which it is based. Of Spanish descent, he settled in Palestine at an early age. A Talmudist to the very core, he nevertheless believed himself to be attended by a mentor power.

[3] Comp. Schechter, ibid., pp. 251-266; Graetz, ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 618-623.

[4] Ibid.

[5] According to a Jewish tradition, Messiah, the son of Joseph, is to be slain before the arrival of the Davidic Messiah. The earliest mention of the former is made in Suk. 52a. Comp. the Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII, p. 511.

[6] On the Lurian Kabbalah, comp. Graetz, ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 619-625; Schechter, ibid., the Jewish Encyclopedia.

[7] Ibid., Graetz and Jewish Encyclopedia.

[8] When two souls are not able to attain perfection separately, they are united in one body, so that, by joint effort, they may attain the end. The name *Ibbur* is given to this process, for the reason that often one of the souls of a higher type, acts as a mother to the weaker one, which is in relation to it as the foetus to the mother. Comp. Waxman, "History of Jewish Literature," Vol. II, p. 382.

[9] This doctrine was not without its corrupting influences, as it served as an easy excuse for husbands to divorce their wives.

[10] "Dybbuk" is the name of a migratory soul on account of its clinging to the body of another man. For the antiquity of the Dybbuk legend, comp. note by Dr. L. Ginzburg to "Ma'aseh Book," by Moses Gaster, p. 686.

[11] Comp. Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 460, which, however, Scholem ("Kabbala" in Encyclopedia Judaica) refutes.

[12] Comp. Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I, p. 50.

[13] Dubnow, ibid., Chapter IV.

[14] Comp. Horodezky, *He-Atid,* V, pp. 105-131.

[15] Rabbi Moses Isserlis (Responsum 7) quotes Solomon Luria's good-natured rebuke for devoting his time to the wisdom of the "uncircumsised" instead of perfecting himself in Hebrew grammar.

[16] Known as *SHeLaH* (abbreviation of *Shnei Luhoth Ha-Berith*), German scholar and author (1555-1630). His work attained great popularity among his contemporaries, because of the exalted character of its ethical tone.

[17] In "Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln" the writer records that, not long after the appearance of the book, her husband read it on his death-bed. Eng. translation, p. 151.

[18] Dubnow, ibid., p. 141; Kastein, "History and Destiny of the Jews," p. 331.

[19] Kastein, "The Messiah of Ismir," p. 35.

[20] Moreover, the author, Nathan Hannover, discovered that the name of the great tormentor Chmiel (nicki) was an abbreviation of *Heble Moshiah Yabo L'Olam,* "the labor pains of the world which is bearing the Messiah." The labor pains of the Messiah was a subject greatly discussed by Jewish writers.

[21] Comp. Kastein, ibid., Chapter IX.

[22] Comp. Balaban, *He-Atid,* V, pp. 132-150; *L'Toldoth Ha-Tenuah Ha-Frankith;* Radkinson, *Toldoth Baal Shem.*

[23] Dubnow, ibid., p. 214.

[24] Comp. Ahron Marcus ("Verus") "Der Chassidismus," pp. 16-18.

[25] Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, p. 308.

[26] Graetz, ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 200-201.

[27] Quoted by Dubnow, ibid., p. 203; *Shibhe Ha-Besht,* Horodezky, p. 33, note 6.

[28] The feeling that the truly pious life can be acquired only through the study of the *Mussar* literature, gave rise to a *Mussar* movement of which Rabbi Israel Salanter was the principal exponent. Comp. Ginzberg, "Students, Saints and Scholars"; the Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IX.

[29] *Kab Ha-Yashar,* "The Just Measure," an ethical treatise by Rabbi Hirsch Kaidennover, Chapter V.

[30] Comp. Ginzberg, "Baal Shem," Jewish Encyclopedia.

[31] "To write amulets for the exorcism of diseases was required of the rabbis, and they devoted themselves to this work; many wished to be thought of as conjurers of spirits." Graetz, ibid., Vol. V, p. 201.

[32] "Solomon Maimon, an Autobiography," English by J. Clark Murray, p. 134.

[33] Ibid., p. 133.

[34] Comp. "The Memoirs of Heinrich Heine," by Gustav Karpeles, Vol. I, p. 152.
[35] Comp. Lewis Browne, "That Man Heine," p. 92.
[36] "The Haskalah Movement," pp. 222 ff.

CHAPTER III

STUDIES in Hassidism, particularly the Baal Shem part of it, have of late been quite numerous. Those who care to follow Rabbi Israel in greater detail, will find a number of excellent books and essays at their disposal.

Shibhe Ha-Besht is a highly imginative, but indispensable, source book of the life of Rabbi Israel. Readable biographies of the founder of Hassidism have been written by Abraham Kahana, M. Radkinson, M. Guttmann, Martin Buber, Torsten Ysander and Aescoly-Weintraub. There are a number of brief sketches and popular essays, of which those by Israel Zangwill and Dr. Solomon Schechter are a few. What Martin Buber and Chajim Bloch have done for the legends of Baal Shem in German, Meyer Levin ("The Golden Mountain") has accomplished for English readers. As S. Dubnow is the historian, S. A. Horodezky is the apologete of Hassidism, to both of whom the credit for popularizing this movement being due. The theological and philosophical implications of Hassidism, suggested by Horodezky, found many followers, the most important of whom being Levertoff, Gulkowitsch, Zeitlin and Ysander. The treasure-trove of Hassidic wit and wisdom, with special emphasis on their ethical import, has of late been made accessible to English readers by "The Hasidic Anthology," an extensive collection, by Louis I. Newman, in collaboration with Samuel Spitz (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York-London, 1934). This list of authors and their works does not include the large number of articles in the periodical literature of almost all languages. Within recent years, Yiddish writers have produced a considerable harvest of books and newspaper articles on Hassidism and the Baal Shem, many of which the reader will find interesting. Harry Sackler, a Yiddish playwright, has written extensively on Hassidism. The reader is referred to The Reflex for two English plays on the subject.

[1] Comp. Horodezky, "The Besht in Folk Lore" in *Ha-Hassiduth V'ha-Hassidim,* Vol. V, pp. 7-34; Martin Buber, *Vom Geiste des Judentums.*
[2] So highly legendary is *Shibhe Ha-Besht,* that for a long time the ques-

tion was whether the book was truth or parody, and whether it was written by a friend or foe of the movement.

[3] *Midrash Ribash Tob* (Borosod, Hungary), p. 70.

[4] *Shibhe,* p. 13.

[5] Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth;* Ysander, *Studien Zum Bestschen Hassidismus;* Ch. Bloch, *Kobez-Mikhtabim,* p. 19.

[6] *Midrash Ribash Tob,* p. 45.

[7] "Solomon Maimon," pp. 33-34.

[8] *Shibhe,* p. 13.

[9] Kahana, ibid., pp. 29-32.

[10] Biographers of Rabbi Israel dismiss "Rabbi Adam" as fictitious, but comp. J. Guenzig, *Die Wundermänner im Jüdischen Volke.*

[11] *Shibhe,* p. 16.

[12] Kahana, ibid., pp. 32 ff. In some sources his name is given as Abraham, but it is quite unlikely, since the name of his son is known to have been Abraham Gershon. Dr. Louis Ginzberg states that Rabbi Abraham Gershon was not rabbi of Brody, as is commonly supposed, but only one of its learned laymen.

[13] Kahana, ibid., p. 33.

[14] *Shibhe,* p. 18; Kahana, p. 35; Horodezky, ibid., pp. 9-10. Mountains have often proven accommodating in Jewish folklore. As a possible source of this story, Dr. Ginzberg pointed out to the author the legend of the valley of Arnon which was fringed on either side by two lofty mountains, which, however, God caused to move together, so as to close in and crush the Amorites who were assembled to attack the Israelites. Comp. L. Ginzberg, "Legends of the Jews," III, pp. 337-338.

[15] To his pupil, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, he wrote that he was thirty years old when Ahiyah had revealed himself to him for the first time. Comp. *Midrash Ribash Tob,* p. 63.

[16] Beginning of *Maggid Debarav L'Ya'akob;* Kahana, ibid., p. 76; Radkinson, p. 50.

[17] Radkinson (ibid., pp. 55-60) quotes discussions of Rabbi Israel with learned rabbis. Comp. Kahana, ibid., pp. 50-55.

[18] Comp. Radkinson, ibid., pp. 87-92; *Shibhe,* pp. 146-147.

[19] *Shibhe,* p. 146, note 29; Radkinson, ibid., pp. 110-131; Kahana, ibid., pp. 55-58.

[20] *Shibhe,* pp. 146-147.

CHAPTER IV

It is only in recent times that the teachings of Hassidism have been accorded serious attention at the hands of scholars. For a long time they were like a "hidden light" locked up in quaint stories and legends which few people took seriously. Once, however, discovered, they proved immensely interesting, since they were found to contain a religious doctrine somewhat different from the one we are accustomed to associate with Judaism.

There are a comparatively large number of books on the teachings of Hassidism, almost all in Hebrew and German, few in English, and only one in French. Horodezky, who introduced the subject in Hebrew literature, is not only the historian of Hassidism, but also its philosopher. Dubnow devotes considerable space to the teachings of Hassidism in the second volume of his history of the movement, and Martin Buber is not only its poet but also its exponent. Dr. Schechter's famous essay opened up a new field for students of Hassidism in the English language, which is now being assiduously expanded and cultivated.

The religio-philosophical teachings of Hassidism in general and Rabbi Israel in particular, the reader will find adequately presented in Paul Levertoff, *Die Religiöse Denkweise des Chassidismus;* Ch. Borgatschoff, *Entstehung, Etwickelung* and *Principien des Chassidismus;* Lazar Gulkowitsch, *Der Hasidismus;* Torsten Ysander, *Studien Zum Bestschen Hasidismus;* Aescoly-Weintraub, *Le Hassidisme;* Hillel Zeitlin, *Ha-Hassiduth;* Abraham Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth;* S. A. Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth.*

For shorter studies the reader is referred to F. A. Doppelt, The Reflex, Vol. IV, p. 57; Solomon Zeitlin, Jewish Tribune, August 1, 1930; J. W. Kirschenbaum, Menorah Journal, Vol. XIII, Nov., 1927; Chajim Bloch, Society for the Advancement of Judaism Review, May 3, 1929.

[1] Rabbi Israel spoke repeatedly of his acquaintance with the works of Saadyah, which, however, may be doubted; but he was certainly acquainted with *Hoboth Ha-Leboboth,* the principal work of Jewish ethico-religious literature.

[2] "The Jewish mind and character in spite of its deeply religious bent, was alien to mysticism," William Ralph Inge, "Christian Mysticism," p. 39.

[3] "The Jew had little knowledge of the Divine in nature," ibid., p. 40.

[4] Quoted by Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I, pp. 225-226.

[5] *Kether Shem Tob.*

[6] "Testament of Ribash."

[6a] Louis I. Newman, "A Hasidic Anthology," p. 203.

[7] "Testament of Ribash."

[8] *Midrash Ribash,* pp. 63-64; Ch. Bloch, *Kobetz-Mikhtabim,* p. 48.

[9] "There is good in evil and truth in falsehood" was one of the frequently repeated sayings of Rabbi Israel.

[10] "Chassidism" in "Studies in Judaism" (first series).

[11] Horodezky, Vol. IV, p. 49.

[12] Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth,* p. 93.

[12a] Louis I. Newman, ibid., pp. 336-337.

[13] "Testament."

[14] Horodezky, Vol. I, pp. 48-49.

[15] Meyer Levin, "The Golden Mountain," p. 114.

[16] Kahana, ibid., p. 87; Levin, ibid., p. 86.

[17] Job, 19, 26. Hassidic teachers did not hesitate to use erotic illustrations when they served to clarify their ideas.

[18] Buber, "Jewish Mysticism," pp. 16-17; Levin, ibid., 132-134.

[19] Ysander, *Studien,* pp. 177-185; Buber, *Vom Geiste des Judentums,* pp. 161-173; Gulkowitsch, *Der Hasidismus,* p. 35; "Jewish Mysticism," pp. 19-27.

[20] Ps. 54, 119.

[21] Ps. 10, 35; Ysander, ibid., pp. 199-208. Moving to and fro while engaged in prayer or in study seems to be an old Jewish habit since reference is made to it already in Halevi's *Kuzari.* For an interesting explanation of this custom, comp. *Kuzari,* II, 80. However, compare Dr. L. Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 211.

[22] *Imre-Zaddikim,* p. 69.

[23] Ysander, ibid., pp. 209-223; Buber, *Vom Geiste,* 137-147.

[24] Treated by Ysander under the heading *Anawa,* ibid., pp. 239-247.

[25] It is the essence of the Hassidic conception of humility, that all men were created from the substance of the Deity. It is told of a certain Zaddik that he remarked that, were the Messiah to say to him he was better than other men, he would answer him that he was not the Messiah.

[26] Kahana, ibid., p. 92.

[27] "There is no room for God in him who is full of himself," was an oft-repeated saying of Rabbi Israel, which bears a close resemblance to a similar sentiment attributed by the Rab Hisda to the Holy One, who says of the vain man, "He and I cannot dwell together in the world," Sotah 5a.

[28] It should not, however, be thought that Rabbi Israel's doctrine of humility is incompatible with man's individuality, for he taught that man's individuality is his essential prerogative, and that not until it is made complete will the Messiah come.

[29] "Testament"; Kahana, ibid., p. 94; Gulkowitsch, ibid., pp. 37-38; Ysander, pp. 259-271.

[30] "Solomon Maimon," p. 43.

[31] Kahana, p. 95.

[32] Horodezky, ibid., Vol. I, p. 51.

[33] *Shibhe,* 101.

[34] He admonished his disciples to deal justly with the Gentiles so as to deserve their respect, *Shibhe,* p. 108.

[35] Kahana, ibid., p. 61; *Shibhe,* p. 97.

[36] *Shibhe,* p. 97.

[37] *Midrash Ribash Tob.*

[38] *Shibhe,* p. 119.

[39] Radkinson, ibid., p. 135.

[40] Schechter, "Studies" (first series), p. 30.

[41] Aescoly-Weintraub, *Le Hassidisme,* pp. 35 ff.

[42] There are many legendary characters in Jewish folklore who visited heaven during their life and held converse with the celestial dignitaries; comp. *Derekh Erez Zutta,* Chapter I.

CHAPTER V

THERE are few full-length biographies of Dob Baer, who, in the opinion of some writers, was the real founder of the Hassidic sect, with the exception of Martin Buber's *Der Grosse Maggid und Seine Nachfolger,* and the works of Horodezky, Kahana and Dubnow. Solomon Maimon has left us what is perhaps the most accurate account of the Preacher of Meseritz and his methods. Dr. L. Ginzberg, in spite of his aversion to Hassidism, has contributed a well-considered study of the Kabbalistic and philosophical teachings of Dob Baer in the Jewish Ecyclopedia. Whatever history has been able to learn about him has come from the inadequate pen of his disciple Solomon Lutzk.

[1] Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* Vol. I, p. 83.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Rabbi Levi Yitzhok, who was personally acquainted with his father, speaks of him as a learned and pious man who traced back his family tree to Rabbi Judah the Saint, redactor of the Mishnah.

[4] He studied in Lemberg under the tutelage of Rabbi Jacob Joshua, the celebrated author of *Pnei-Joshua.*

[5] Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth,* pp. 147 ff.

[6] *Maggid Debarav L'Ya'akob,* Introduction.

[7] For other versions of their meeting, comp. Kahana, ibid., pp. 148-150.

[8] *Maggid,* ibid.

[9] Horodezky, ibid., p. 80.

[10] Ibid., pp. 81-83.

[11] "Solomon Maimon," p. 154.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Graetz, "History," Vol. V, pp. 379-380.

[14] "Solomon Maimon," p. 168.

[15] Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 431.

[16] Nehemiah, 9, 6.

[17] *Or-Torah,* p. 31; *Or-Ha-Emeth,* p. 62; Ginzberg, ibid.

[18] He interpreted the verse, "And he spoke of the trees" (I. K. v. 13) in the sense that it is within the power of the truly wise and pious man to draw the divine sparks even from the most commonplace things.

[19] Comp. *Or-Ha-Emeth,* p. 37. "Our Law is divided between fear, love and joy, by each of which one can approach God. Thy contrition on a fast day does not bring thee nearer to God than thy joy on the Sabbath and holy days if its outcome is a devout heart," Halevi, *Kuzari,* II, 50.

[20] Ibid., p. 76.

[21] *Maggid,* p. 34.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Prov. 10, 25.

[24] Ginzberg, Jewish Encyclopedia, "Dob Baer."

[25] With the exception of Sheneir Zalman, few men realized the importance of the doctrine of *Zimzum* in the Hassidic ideology as did Dob Baer. A good deal of the material of section "X" of this chapter was suggested by "The Sacred Fire," by B. Z. Goldberg, Horace Liveright, Inc., 1930.

[26] Comp. Ginzberg, ibid.

[27] Comp. *Kuzari,* II, 16; "Palestine was appointed to guide all the world."

CHAPTER VI

Rabbi Jacob Joseph, the most prolific Hassidic writer of his generation, has been least written about. Posterity has passed over in silence the stormy petrel who kept the Jewish world in a state of excitement more than one hundred and fifty years ago. Time has broken the lance he had wielded with such undaunted courage.

But his own works, *Toldoth Jacob Joseph, Zofnath Pa'aneah, Porath Joseph,* and *Kesoneth Passim,* give a clearer picture of the nature and character of him than any other hand could have done. They reveal the strong, pugnacious and uncompromising character that he was, enthusiastic about those he admired, bitter and unrelenting to those who crossed his will.

Dubnow, Horodezky and Kahana, however, did not neglect the Rabbi of Polona and devoted to him a niche in their studies in Hassidism, as did also Martin Buber. For the rest, one is limited to his own works, and the references to him in the Hassidic writings, notably *Shibhe Ha-BeSHT.*

[1] *Toldoth Jacob Joseph,* "Bo."
[2] Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth,* p. 109.
[3] *Shibhe,* p. 29; Kahana, ibid., pp. 105-106.
[4] Martin Buber, "Jewish Mysticism," p. 141.
[5] *Ben Porath Joseph,* toward the end.
[6] *Shibhe,* p. 29.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Kahana, ibid., p. 110.
[9] *Midrash Ribash Tob.*
[10] Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* Vol. I, p. 109.
[11] The book "enjoyed" a public burning in Wilna, Prague and Brody.
[12] *Zofnath Pa'aneah "Va-Era."*
[13] Toldoth, *Zav.*
[14] Ibid., *Vayishlah.*
[15] Porath, *Vayehi.*
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., *Zav.*
[18] Ibid.

[19] Rabbi Jacob Joseph went beyond all the Hassidic teachers of his time in identifying the *Shekhinah* with God.
[20] Toldoth, *Bereshith.*
[21] Kahana, ibid., p. 115.
[22] Horodezky, ibid., Vol. I, p. 130.

CHAPTER VII

ORAL tradition has been kinder to Rabbi Levi Yitzhok than the written records. While there are many stories and anecdotes circulating about him, there is no satisfactory biography of this truly remarkable and gentle teacher of Hassidism. His only published work, *Kedushath Levi,* "The Holiness of Levi," a collection of discourses on Sabbath and holiday occasions, reveals something of the quality of the man's mind, but it is all too insufficient.

The historians of Hassidism already referred to, have come to the rescue, and one may find in their works enough information to construct at least a miniature portrait of the saintly teacher of Berditchev. In *Esser-Oroth,* "Ten Luminaries," the reader will find a great deal of the material on which the later biographers of Levi Yitzhok have drawn. A collection of the legends of the author of *Kedushath Levi* will be found in Kahana's *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth.*

[1] Legend attributed to Baal Shem knowledge of his birth. He thanked God that a defender had arisen unto Israel. Levi Yitzhok was credited with having possessed the soul of Rabbi Akiba. Comp. *Esser-Oroth,* p. 45; Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* Vol. II, p. 73.
[2] "Ethics of the Fathers," 4, 14.
[3] *Esser-Oroth,* p. 46.
[4] Concerning Aaron of Karlin, comp. Horodezky, ibid., pp. 113-120.
[5] Ibid., pp. 78-80.
[6] Comp. Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth,* p. 260.
[7] Ibid., p. 259.
[8] The same legend is also told in the name of Rabbi Israel Salanter. Comp. Dr. Ginzberg, "Students, Scholars and Saints," p. 182.
[9] Kahana, ibid., p. 252.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., p. 253.
[12] Horodezky, ibid., pp. 92-93.
[13] Kahana, ibid., pp. 264-265.
[14] Ibid., p. 264.
[15] Ibid., p. 265; *Esser-Oroth,* p. 48.
[16] Horodezky, ibid., p. 82.
[17] *Esser-Oroth,* p. 46.
[18] Kahana, ibid., p. 259.

[19] Ibid., p. 258.
[19a] Ibid.; Louis I. Newman, "A Hasidic Anthology," p. 343.
[20] Ibid., p. 257; Horodezky, ibid., pp. 93-94, "Leaders of Hassidism," pp. 45-46.
[21] Jer., 4, 19.
[22] Ibid., 8, 21.
[23] Numbers, 23, 21.

CHAPTER VIII

ALTHOUGH Sheneir Zalman helped to make history, Jewish history has taken little notice of him. Graetz barely mentions him, and the Jewish Encyclopedia dismisses him all too briefly. Not even so voluminous a writer on Hassidism as Horodezky as much as included his name in his pantheon of the Hassidic demigods.

Sheneir Zalman paid the price of his peculiarly complex and complicated personality, for he possessed the learning of a sage and the emotional temperament of a Hassid. He was both scholar and mystic, rabbi and Zaddik. The rabbis never forgave him for his devotion to Hassidism, and the Hassidim never ceased suspecting him because of his learning, with the result that he was neglected by both.

In the enlightened circles of Hassidism, however, his reputation as the founder of HaBaD is assured. Three full-size biographies have been dedicated to him. They are: M. Radkinson, *Amude Ha-HaBaD;* H. M. Heilman, *Beth Rabbi;* and M. Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rab M'ladi,* to which last work is appended a survey of his scientific attainments, notably mathematics, by H. Y. Borenstein. Because his career was co-extensive with the most eventful period in the history of Hassidism, Dubnow's second volume of *Geschichte* is taken up largely with the life and struggles of the Rabbi of Ladi, with fifty pages devoted to him by Kahana in his *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth.*

Yet no biographer of Sheneir Zalman portrayed him as faithfully as he had done himself in his numerous pastoral letters to his flock. The essential characteristics of the man, his gentleness and tolerance, his firm yet peace-loving nature, shine forth in these papers as in no other document dedicated to his name. For a complete understanding of the man they are indispensable material.

[1] Radkinson, *Amude Ha-HaBaD,* p. 8. He is described by his biographers as having been a handsome man of an impressive appearance. A broad forehead, a long beard, regular features and expressive eyes, made him an outstanding figure in any gathering.

[2] Not much is known of his father, but there is the testimony of his contemporaries who spoke of him in the highest terms of praise. Barukh was opposed to his son's Hassidic affiliations, and showed his disapproval by changing his residence to Hungary, where he lived in obscurity to the time of his death. Comp. *Hazofeh,* V, pp. 270-271.

[3] Comp. Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rab M'ladi,* I, p. 3.

[4] It was at this time, according to his biographers, that he cultivated the secular sciences. Comp. Radkinson, ibid., p. 8.

[5] Teitelbaum, ibid., p. 14; Heilman, *Beth Rabbi,* III, p. 2; I, p. 108.

[6] Radkinson (ibid., p. 9, note 11) is authority for the statement that his work on the *Shulhan Arukh* was begun some years before he came under the influence of Dob Baer.

[7] Radkinson (ibid., p. 9) states that the meeting of the "Ladier" with the "Preacher" was purely accidental. According to him, Sheneir Zalman had imposed upon himself the penance of *Galuth,* "banishment," in the course of which wanderings he heard of the fame of Dob Baer and became so interested that he lost no time in visiting him.

[8] Comp. on Rabbi Abraham, the "Angel," Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," pp. 50-53.

[9] Comp. Heilman, III, p. 4; Radkinson, ibid., p. 17.

[10] The legend is told by Radkinson and Heilman.

[11] Comp. Teitelbaum (Chapter II) on his work on the *Shulhan Arukh.*

[12] Ibid., I, p. 10.

[13] For additional information about the Gaon, comp. Dr. S. Schechter, "Studies in Judaism" (first series); Dr. Ginzberg, ibid.; Graetz, "History of the Jews," Vol. V, p. 389; Dubnow, *Geschichte,* Vol. I, pp. 178 ff., and the Jewish Encyclopedia.

[14] Dubnow, ibid., p. 190.

[15] Comp. Heilman, III, p. 8, note 1.

[16] Meg. 28a; also San. 38b, where it is forbidden to enter into conversation with an unbeliever. Comp. Teitelbaum, ibid., pp. 43-44; Heilman, ibid., III, p. 13.

[17] Follow the story of the ruse in Dubnow, ibid., pp. 117-121.

[18] Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I, pp. 373-374.

[19] Ibid., *Geschichte,* Vol. II, p. 135; Radkinson, ibid., p. 42.

[20] Heilman, ibid., pp. 54 ff.; Radkinson, pp. 43 ff.; Teitelbaum, I, p. 72 ff.

[21] About his incarceration and the legends circulated concerning it, comp. *Shibhe Ha-Rab,* p. 4; Radkinson, pp. 40-53.

[22] Ps. 55, 19.

[23] For the text of his letter, comp. Teitelbaum, I, p. 83.

[24] Comp. Teitelbaum, I, Chapter XI; Dubnow, ibid., Vol. II, pp. 149-171.

[25] Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

[1] Heilman, *Beth Rabbi,* I, pp. 77-78; Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rab M'ladi,* I, p. 130. Among the scholars and heads of Jewish communities he visited, was one Joshua Zeitlin, a distinguished scholar and noted philanthropist who stood high in his relations to the Russian court, by which he was titled "Imperial Court Councilor." Although he held no official rabbinical position, his authority, because of his learning, was widely recognized by the rabbis.

[2] To Rabbi Barukh of Tulchyn the "credit" for perfecting the commercial theory of Zaddikism, is due. It was owing to him, that the impression that the Zaddik is the middleman between God and his people went forth.

[3] Teitelbaum, ibid., p. 147.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The attempt to bring in the sage of Berditchev on the side of Zalman's opponents, failed. In a letter to Abraham of Kalisk, Levi Yitzhok not only refused to join the controversy, but even praised the "Ladier" in the most flattering terms. Comp. Heilman, ibid., p. 147; Teitelbaum, ibid., pp. 144-145.

[6] Mystery seems to cover Sheneir Zalman's change of residence from Liozna to Ladi. While Heilman states that the former regretted his departure, the likelihood that he had been compelled to leave it on account of internal strife due to his Hassidic activities, is not excluded.

[7] Teitelbaum, ibid., II, devotes many pages (37-94) to the development of the doctrine of *Zimzum* and Rabbi Sheneir Zalman's treatment of the subject, which the careful reader will not fail to notice.

[8] Dr. Rufus M. Jones, "Studies in Mystical Religion," as though the author was stating the thoughts of the Rabbi of Ladi.

[9] Teitelbaum, ibid., p. 96.

[10] Teitelbaum, pp. 8-9.

[11] Zohar, Ber. 11b.

[12] Quoted by Teitelbaum, ibid., p. 141.

[13] Ibid., p. 150, and many other places.

[14] There are many other really beautiful reflections upon the subject of prayer.

[15] Comp. Teitelbaum, ibid., chapter on "Tolerance."

[16] *Tanyah,* 37.

[17] *Iggereth Ha-Kodesh.*

[18] *Torah-Or, "Beshalah."*

[19] *Likute-Torah, "R'eh."*

[20] Quoted by Teitelbaum, ibid., p. 225, note.

[21] *Tanyah,* 23.

[22] *Siddur,* "Gate of Prayer."

[23] *Iggereth Ha-Kodesh.* On the Rabbinic conception of Zeddakah, comp. *Seder, Elijah R.* (ed. Friedmann), pp. 169-170.

[24] Ibid.

[25] *Torah-Or, "Shmoth."*

[26] Ibid.

[27] Comp. Teitelbaum, ibid., pp. 172 ff., for Rabbi Zalman's attitude to Jewish learning.

[28] Although Sheneir Zalman often used the *Moreh* and quoted from it, he never mentioned the work by name, no doubt because of the ill-repute in which it stood among the Hassidim.

[29] For a careful analysis of Zalman's *opus magnum,* comp. Dubnow, *Geschichte,* Vol. II, pp. 100-115.

[30] Comp. on this subject Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I.

[31] The calling of the Synhedrion seriously disturbed all the governments of Europe inimical to France. Austria followed the example of Russia by forbidding its Jews to have any relations with their French co-religionists, for fear of being influenced by them. Comp. Graetz, "History of the Jews," Vol. V, pp. 493 ff.; Dubnow, ibid., pp. 346-347.

[32] The Russian government did all it could to frighten the Jews with the "evil" intentions of Napoleon. The Synhedrion he assembled was represented to them as being antagonistic to the interests of the Jewish religion, and the emperor himself was pictured as a false Messiah whose purpose it was to overthrow religion and morals.

[33] The rabbi of Ladi took every opportunity to represent the Russian emperor in the most favorable light, especially in his relation to the Jews, by figuring him as their friend and protector. Comp. Heilman, pp. 96-97.

[34] For the text of the letter, comp. Heilman, I, pp. 95-96.

[35] Comp. Dubnow, ibid.

[36] The emperor himself was moved by the patriotism the Jews had displayed and spoke highly of their services. Comp. Dubnow, ibid., p. 358.

[37] Comp. Teitelbaum, I, p. 159. The early biographers represent him as having been on terms of intimacy with the Russian army officials. Although this is no doubt greatly exaggerated, there is reason to believe that they appreciated his services and showed their gratitude in various ways. Thus, when he felt himself compelled to flee from place to place on account of the advancing French army, they placed traveling facilities at his disposal. Comp. Heilman, I, p. 98.

[38] For the last days of Sheneir Zalman, comp. Teitelbaum I, pp. 162-165; Heilman, ibid., p. 100.

[39] On the reaction that followed the defeat of Napoleon, comp. Graetz, ibid., Vol. V, Chapter XIII; Dubnow, ibid.; Kastein, "History and Destiny of the Jews," p. 392.

CHAPTER X

More is known about the outer and inner life of Nahman Bratzlav than any other Hassidic leader. He had the gift, or vanity, of self-revelation which left few incidents in his life unrecorded. Added to his self-portrayal, there are the records of his friend and pupil, Nathan of Niemerov, whose vigilant eye overlooked few of the facts and foibles of his great master.

Modern literature, too, felt itself attracted by the dramatic career

of the Master of Bratzlav and devoted a number of books and short studies to his picturesque life. But, while a number of men have written of Rabbi Nahman, for a complete picture of this interesting Hassidic saint one will have to go to his own works and those of his first biographer.

His stories, which still enjoy a large reading public, have been made available to modern readers chiefly through the work of Professor Martin Buber, whose German rendition does as much credit to the translator as to their creator.

Meyer Levin has more than entered into the spirit of the tales of Rabbi Nahman. By his version of them in, "The Golden Mountain," he made the tales of Bratzlav available to English readers.

[1] It would be almost impossible to quote all the instances of his self-esteem. Thus, in an outburst of self-laudation, he exclaimed, "There has never been one like myself in the world." Comp. *Haye-Moharan,* 5a.

[2] "Son of Commandment." This term is applied to a boy when he completes his thirteenth year, at which time he reaches his religious maturity. This entrance into religious manhood is expressed by extending to the lad an adult's privileges.

[3] Comp. *Maggid Sihoth,* 1a.

[4] Ibid., 2a.

[5] A ritual bath, though the term is not confined to this sort of bathing. Ritual purification, for physical reasons, is prescribed in Lev. II, 36. The basic principle involved in purification was the use of running water; therefore all such baths are built so that the water rises from beneath, and the bath is deep enough for the complete immersion of the body.

[6] *Shibhe Nahman Bratzlav,* 6b.

[7] *Maggid,* 1b.

[8] Comp. Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," pp. 82-83.

[9] *Shibhe,* 4a.

[10] *Haye-Moharan,* p. 1.

[11] *Shibhe,* 9a.

[12] *Haye,* p. 43.

[13] *Maggid,* 4; *Or-Emeth,* p. 157.

[14] *Maggid.*

[15] Ibid., 8a.

[16] *Haye,* p. 23.

[17] *Yeme-Moharanath,* 10a.

[18] Ibid.

[19] *Likute-Moharan,* p. 60; Horodezky, ibid., p. 87.

[20] *Likute-Tefiloth.*

[21] *Shibhe,* 5a.

[22] *Sefer Ha-Midoth.*

[23] *Shibhe,* 8b. Another of his self-lauding sayings was "I have kindled a torch that will never be put out."

[24] "Great is my learning; it came to me by divine grace," *Maggid,* 27a.

[25] Probably basing his faith on the saying of the Rabbis: "The righteous are destined to be able to revive the dead," Pes. 68a.

[26] *Shibhe,* 9b; Horodezky, ibid., p. 88.

[27] *Haye,* 20b.

[28] *Maggid,* 3b.

[29] *Shibhe,* 14a; Horodezky, ibid., p. 88.

[30] *Maggid,* 13b.

[31] Gottlober, *Ha-Boker Or,* VI, p. 75.

[32] Comp. Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* III, p. 30.

[33] *Shibhe,* 12a. He reconciled himself to the price he was called upon to pay for differing with his contemporaries, and regarded the misfortunes that befell him as evidence of his superiority. Thus, he once said, "Peace is the virtue of mediocrity."

[34] In a letter written to his brother who complained to him of the persecutions he was called upon to endure.

[35] "One may live by the delight to be derived from my wisdom alone," *Maggid,* 26a.

[36] Nahman Bratzlav did not shrink from comparing himself to the greatest men in Jewish history. He once said that had he lived during the time of the masters of the Talmud, he would have been regarded not less great than they were.

CHAPTER XI

[1] *Maggid Sihoth,* 14a; Ma'agle Zeddek, p. 14.

[2] Singer Prayer Book, London, 1912, p. 39.

[3] Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," p. 91.

[4] *Likute-Tefiloth,* 107a; Horodezky, ibid., p. 98.

[4a] Louis I. Newman, "A Hasidic Anthology," pp. 514-515.

[5] *Haye-Moharan,* p. 19a.

[6] *Shibhe,* 4a.

[7] *Lekute-Tefiloth,* 107a.

[8] Ibid., 164b.

[9] *Shibhe,* 113a.

[10] Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* III, p. 40.

[11] *Likute-Tefiloth,* 42a.

[12] Ps. 34, 16.

[13] *Shibhe,* 10a; Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," p. 92.

[14] San. 30b.

[14a] Horodezky, ibid., p. 99.

[15] Meyer Levin, "The Golden Mountain," p. xiii.

[15a] For an interpretation of the "Story of the Seven Beggars" comp. Kahana, *Sefer Ha-Hassiduth,* pp. 375 ff.

[16] *Yeme-Moharanath.*

[16a] Horodezky, ibid., p. 106.

[17] *Likute-Moharan,* I, 65; Horodezky, ibid., p. 104.

[17a] "It is necessary to have pity on the world," was his answer to the pupils who begged him to rest from his work. Comp. Horodezky, ibid., p. 105.

[18] *Shibhe,* 9b.

[18a] About *Likute Moharan,* comp. Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth,* Vol. III, pp. 75-76.

[19] *Maggid,* 25a. Shortly before his death, Nahman believed that he had reached the highest position given to a mortal being to occupy and was therefore looking forward to the time when he might free himself of his physical form, since it was impossible for him to stay in one rank. Comp. Horodezky, ibid., 105. For a full account of the closing days of Nahman Bratzlav, the reader will do well to consult Kahana and Horodezky.

CHAPTER XII

The crusade against Hassidism, although prosecuted with great energy, produced no literature worthy of its name. Whatever was written on the subject, may be followed in Eliezer Zweifel's "Peace Unto Israel," Dubnow's *"Geschichte d. Chass.,"* Vol. II, and "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I. Ephraim Deinard rescued from oblivion the polemical writings of Israel Loebel and David Makow by reprinting them. The satirical campaign against Hassidism the reader will find in any good history of modern Hebrew literature. English readers will avail themselves of Dr. Israel Davidson's "Parody in Jewish Literature," and "Hebrew Reborn" by Dr. Shalom Spiegel.

[1] The literary output of Israel Lobel against Hassidism consisted of three brochures, *Sefer Ha-Vikuah,* "The Book of Debates," *Ta'avath Zaddikim,* "The Lust of the Righteous," and a pamphlet in German, *Glaubwirdige Machrichte von der in Polen und Litauen befindlichen Sekte Chassidim gennant.* Zweifel gives an extensive summary of the first pamphlet in "Peace Unto Israel." In the second brochure, the author deplores the strife and divisiveness which Hassidism had brought into the Jewish household. The activities of Loebel may be followed in much greater detail in Dubnow's *Geschichte,* Vol. II.

[2] David Makow was the author of *Zemir Aritzim,* "The Discomfiture of the Wicked," *Sheber Poshim,* "The Destruction of the Sinners," and *Zimrath Am Ha-Aretz,* "The Song of the Ignorant." Comp. Dubnow, ibid.

[3] For the documents of excommunications, comp. Zweifel, *Shalom al Yisroel,* and Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rab M'ladi,* pp. 208-217.

[4] Dr. Israel Davidson, "Parody in Jewish Literature," p. 61.

[5] Dr. Shalom Spiegel, "Hebrew Reborn," p. 124.

[6] Nahum Krokhmal (1785-1840), pioneer of Haskalah, historian, philosopher, and author of *Moreh Nebukhe Ha-Zman,* "Guide for the Perplexed of the Times," was perhaps the greatest scholar of the Galician school of Enlightenment.

[7] Solomon Maimon (1754-1800), philosopher, adventurer and cynic, left in his famous "Autobiography" a graphic account of the solemn assemblies which were held in the house of the Preacher of Meseritz and

recorded some of the ingenious methods of his interpretation of biblical texts delivered on those occasions.

[8] "History of the Jews," Vol. V, p. 375.

[9] *Der Chassidismus, eine Kulturgeschichtliche Studie,* p. 5.

[10] "Rome and Jerusalem," English by Meyer Waxman, p. 248.

[11] *Haskalah* denotes a movement to modernize Jews and Judaism which began in Galicia in the middle of the eighteenth century, and thence spread to Austria, Poland and Russia. Comp. Jacob S. Raisin, "The Haskalah Movement."

[12] Davidson, ibid., p. 71.

[13] On the Zweifel episode, comp. Spiegel, ibid., pp. 131-134.

[14] Comp. Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. I, pp. 384-389.

[15] "Israel Among the Nations," p. 209.

[16] Dubnow, ibid., p. 382.

[17] Isaac Loeb Perez (1851-1915) was one of the most brilliant and successful Hebrew and Yiddish writers of his time. His life ran the gamut of all the Jewish movements of his generation. As a symbolist and romanticist, the Hassidic philosophy appealed to his imagination. Besides stories and poetry, he also wrote dramas with a mystical tendency. Later in his life, he gave up Hebrew and wrote exclusively in Yiddish. His popularity may be judged by the fact that more than 100,000 people attended his funeral. Cf. David Polish, Perez, Apostle of Neo-Chassidism, Hebrew Union College Monthly, March 1, 1932.

[18] His essay, "Chassidism," referred to in other parts of the book, has no doubt contributed to stimulate interest in this movement in the English-speaking countries.

[19] Professor Martin Buber has been correctly styled the "European Leader of Neo-Hassidism." As a writer he always stresses the mystical in his stories and essays. He regards modern Jewish nationalism as a synthesis of *Haskalah* and Hassidism.

[20] *Studien Zum Bestschen Hasidismus,* Uppsula, 1933.

CHAPTER XIII

[1] Introduction to "The Dybbuk."

[2] Comp. Horace M. Kallen, "The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy."

[3] Comp. M. J. Landa, "The Jew in Drama," pp. 281 ff.

[4] Sch. Ans-ki (1863-1920), pen-name of Solomon Seinwil Rappoport, Russian revolutionary, who lived in exile in France and Switzerland. At first estranged from his people, he later drew closer to them, when he began to pour forth his emotions in poems and dramas, "The Dybbuk" being one of them.

[5] First appearing in Yiddish, it was afterwards translated into English by Maurice Samuel and was subsequently played in Yiddish and English as "Yoshe Kalb," the name of its principal character.

[5a] Ps. 100, 2.

[6] Comp. A. Z. Idelsohn, "Jewish Music," pp. 411-434. See also H. Mayerowitsch, London Jewish Chronicle, February 20, 1931.

[7] Gen. 6, 21.

[8] Ps. 119, 54.
[9] Ber. 3b.
[10] I Sam. 16, 16.
[11] Ps. 137, 4.
[12] Job, 30, 31.
[13] Idelsohn, ibid.
[14] Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rab Miladi*, I, p. 9.
[15] Idelsohn, ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ps. 35, 10.
[19] "The Dance of Life," p. 39.
[20] Ex. 15, 20.—Ibid., 32, 19.—Jud. 11, 34.—I Sam. 18, 6.—II Sam. 6, 16.
[21] *Ta'anith*, IV, 8.
[22] Rabbi Judah ben Illai danced at weddings, waving a myrtle branch, *Ket.* 17a. For other occasions when dancing was indulged in by the solemn masters of the Talmud, comp. *Suk.* 15a.
[23] A brochure, "Chassidism," p. 28.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE are few source books that can be recommended for the subject of this chapter. Whatever information is to be gained on the daily life of the Hassidim, must be gleaned from personal experience. The polemical writings of the Haskalah period are full of references to the customs of the Hassidim, but they cannot be accepted without reservation. S. Dubnow and S. A. Horodezky are very informative, as is also *Chassidismus und Zaddikismus*, by Dr. I. J. Niemerower. A great deal of material on this subject may be gathered from the Yiddish writers on Hassidism. The author, however, has had the privilege of personal conferences with many Hassidim who reminisced freely on their childhood experiences, the information gathered from this source having been most illuminating.

[1] From Prof. Ginzberg the author learned that the so-called *Maz* was a synagogue functionary among Mithnagdim as well. In some communities, as, for instance, Wilna, these rabbinical authorities are quite popular. The position of the Maz was, however, different among the Habad Hassidim than what it obtained in Galicia.
[2] "Where the Hassidim form a small section of the community, they rely upon private help, but where they are in the majority, they have a community-organized charity of their own. Lemberg and Cracow have about the same charity system as Wilna and Kovno." Note by Dr. Ginzberg.
[3] "Rome and Jerusalem," p. 248.
[4] Introduction to "The Dybbuk."
[5] The *Heder*, which Dr. Ginzberg calls "one of the greatest institutions

of post-biblical Judaism," was made by him the subject of a fascinating essay in "Students, Scholars and Saints," pp. 1-34.

[6] "Studies in Judaism" (first series), p. 16.

[7] Dr. Niemerower, *Chassidismus und Zaddikismus,* p. 40.

[8] "According to tradition, parents waited only till their children reached a nubial age to marry them off. . . . Solomon Maimon . . . married a girl of his own age before he had attained his eleventh year, and because he had no children when he was twelve years old, his mother-in-law suspected him of being in league with a sorceress. There were many households in which the combined age of husband and wife did not amount to thirty years. This custom was the means of preserving the young Jew from libertinism. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, "Israel Among the Nations," p. 153.

[9] "Perushim were young married men who left home and family—Perushim means those who separate themselves—to devote themselves to study. This idea was quite an original creation of Salanter, as all the other Yeshibot of up to that time were mainly frequented by young unmarried men." Dr. L. Ginzberg, ibid., pp. 161-162.

[10] "The *Messilath Yesharim,*" writes Dr. Ginzberg in a note to this book, "was read more by the *Mithnagdim* than by the Hassidim, the point of view of Luzzatto being closer to the former than to the latter."

[11] Niemerower, ibid., pp. 38 ff.

[12] Comp. Act 1, "The Dybbuk."

[13] Comp. Dubnow, "History of the Jews in Russia and Poland," Vol. II, pp. 124-125.

[14] Comp. Niemerower, ibid.; Dr. J. Horowitz, *Kalender für Israeliten,* Wien, 1866, pp. 189 ff.

[15] Comp. I. Eben, "The Rebbe's Court."

[16] Ibid.

[17] Writers on Hassidism (Torsten Ysander) explain the presence of the twelve loaves of bread as symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.

[18] Comp. Ysander, *Studien Zum Bestschen Hasidismus,* pp. 305 ff.

[19] Ibid., pp. 308 ff.

[20] Comp. Niemerower (ibid., p. 47) for a fine passage on this subject.

[21] Ysander, ibid., 312; Eben, ibid; Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," p. 132.

[22] Ysander, ibid., pp. 316-317.

[23] Comp. Horodezky, ibid., p. 133.

[24] Comp. ibid., pp. 133-134.

[25] Ibid., p. 134.

[26] Comp. Zohar, II, 17a. For the texts of the prayer-notes, comp. Ysander, ibid., pp. 324-326; Eben, ibid., p. 185.

[27] On the subject of the Quittel and Pidyon, comp. Horodezky, ibid., pp. 129-130.

[28] Comp. Eben, ibid., pp. 195-201.

CHAPTER XV

ALTHOUGH from Solomon Maimon to "Yoshe Kalb," the Zaddik figured as a hero or villain in many books, essays, stories and satires,

no serious study of the subject has been attempted. While he has been variously parodied and caricatured, prejudice and passion have only too often taken the place of reason and understanding. The discerning reader can expect little light from the literature on the subject, therefore, though it is extensive. Dr. I. J. Niemerower's *Chassidismus und Zaddikismus,* and a chapter in Ysander's *Studien,* are almost all that the student of Hassidism can be offered on this absorbing theme, a Jewish writer equal to the author of "Varieties of Religious Experience" not having yet arisen to do the subject justice. The reader will glean some information on the cult of Zaddikism from Horace M. Kallen's book, "Frontiers of Hope." More fortunate, however, are the Yiddish readers who will find quite an extensive literature at their disposal.

[1] Although this functionary may be said to be the creation of Hassidism, he had his forerunner in the Baal Shem who, although under a different name, discharged all his functions.

[2] The interested reader will find an illuminating account of the Hassidic saints mentioned in the paragraph covered by this note in S. A. Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," under their respective names.

[3] Comp. "History of the Jews," Vol. V, p. 201.

[4] Hos., 9, 7.

[5] Comp. Niemerower, *Chassidismus und Zaddikismus,* pp. 53 ff.

[6] Ibid., pp. 75 ff.; Horodezky, ibid., chapter, "The Communal Life of the Hassidim."

[7] "Solomon Maimon," p. 154.

[8] Comp. Horodezky's article, "The Jewish Woman in Hassidism" in *Ha-Hassiduth,* Vol. IV, pp. 68-71.

[9] Comp. Horodezky, "Leaders of Hassidism," pp. 114 ff.

[10] In answer to a woman's question, the reply was given, "There is no wisdom for a woman except at the distaff." *Yoma,* 66b.

[11] Comp. Horodezky, ibid., pp. 125-126.

[12] There is no more realistic picture of the pride and arrogance of the Zaddikim in their decadence than in Singer Story "The Sinner," or, in its dramatized form, "Yoshe Kalb." All the meanness and pettiness, all the intrigue and scandal that contributed to the destruction of Hassidism, is portrayed by the author in a masterly fashion.

[12a] Comp. Rabbi Joshua Rokeah, *Igroth Soferim,* II.

[13] Although their opponents cannot be exculpated from responsibility, the Hassidim were charged with the strife and disunion that was introduced into the Jewish camp. This indictment was the principal count in Israel Loebel's brochure, *Ta'avath Zaddikim,* "The Lust of the Righteous." Comp. Dubnow *Geschichte,* Vol. II, p. 177.

[14] "Frontiers of Hope," p. 190, by Horace M. Kallen, Horace Liveright, Inc., 1929.

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